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Dessert Songs

Meanwhile, somewhere in the Sahara, there may or may not be people reading this issue of COMICS SCENE. It's a little warm there and a bit arid, but otherwise a perfect place to read. Not a great deal of noise. Lots of sand. Plenty of sunlight. Camels.

Of course, there are better places to read magazines, like in the privacy of your own home in your favorite chair with your favorite dessert at your side.

Which brings us to our point. COMICS SCENE seems headed for success. And success in magazine publishing is simply defined as continued existence. After all, this is a field where three out of four "new" magazines *die* within their first year of publication. Those are not pleasant statistics.

COMICS SCENE is a special case. As many readers know, this title was originally published from 1981-83 and then folded. We revived it in July 1987 as a one-shot test in the newsstand desert. Results were encouraging enough to go ahead for four quarterly issues in 1988 (as COMICS SCENE QUARTERLY). And after much discussion and examination of that quartet's prospects, publishers greenlighted a more timely frequency. That move was effective last issue, though it was announced with little fanfare. Let's do that now.

Ta-da! COMICS SCENE is now *bi-monthly*—and that's because of all *you* readers who've supported it. Our thanks.

And as befitting a bi-monthly magazine, we're pleased to announce that after a long, hot, Sahara-like dry spell, subscriptions to COMICS SCENE are also now available. This, too, is due to readers who kept asking us for subs—since the magazine wasn't always on hand at the local SF/comics specialty stores, newsstands, Waldenbooks or B. Dalton's (apparently because it quickly sold out). In this case, when we say readers *demanded* subscriptions, we really mean it.

Info is elsewhere, but let's repeat it here. Subscriptions are $15.99 (six issues/year). Foreign subscriptions (including the Sahara) are $20.99. Make checks or money orders payable to O'Quinn Studios, 475 Park Avenue South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. Got that?

Well, we're pleased. This is what we always wanted; we being the editorial team and our crackerjack Art Department—Art Director Jim McLernon and designer extraordinaire Calvin Lee, ably assisted this issue by Art Director Maggie Hollands who pitched in designing when dreaded deadlines loomed.

All this deserves a celebration—and we've ordered it up, sort of as a dessert, this issue. You'll find legends (Bob Kane, Friz Freleng), movies (*The Punisher, Return of Swamp Thing*), TV (*My Secret Identity, Tales from the Crypt*), overworked writers (Chuck Dixon, just one in our series, collect them all), intriguing superheroes (Tick, Hero Alliance) and lots more. Then, of course, there's *Batman*, the eagerly awaited Warner Bros. film premiering in June. (And yes, we *did* name a Batman contest grand prize winner, Andrew Seward Duncan; more on that next time.) This issue, you'll meet production designer Anton Furst and costume designer Bob Ringwood and see a few never-before-published views of the *Batman* world. The Gotham City tour begins on page 28.

You'll find more of *Batman* not only here, but in STARLOG, our sister magazine. STARLOG #142, now on sale, features a cover story/visit to the *Batman* set. Costume designer Bob Ringwood details the other problems of dressing the Dark Knight as well as outfitting the heroes of such SF films as *Dune* and *Solarbabies* in issue #143. And in STARLOG #144 (on sale June 1), actress Kim Basinger—who portrays Vicki Vale—gets her just desserts, revealing what she thinks of Batman. It's the kind of exclusive interview that would heat up the Sahara—if it wasn't so warm there already.

—David McDonnell/Editor

COMICS SCENE RETURNS as the summer begins. Director **Tim Burton** reports in from the Batcave on his newest film, **Batman**. . . **Walt Simonson** explains how he hopes to improve the world's greatest comics magazine, **Fantastic Four**. . . and creators begin an eternal debate on the nature of death in four-color. It's all in **COMICS SCENE #8, on sale June 22, 1989.**

COMICS SCENE

Hamm & Batman

On his adventures with the Dark Knight, *Batman* screenwriter Sam Hamm has stepped from the movies into the world of comics.

"During the writers' strike," Hamm explains, "I got a call from [DC Comics publisher] Jenette Kahn and [Batman comics editor] Denny O'Neill. Denny asked, since the strike was on and I wasn't working, if I would be interested in writing a Batman story." Hamm was—and soon made his four-color debut, scripting *Detective Comics* #598-600.

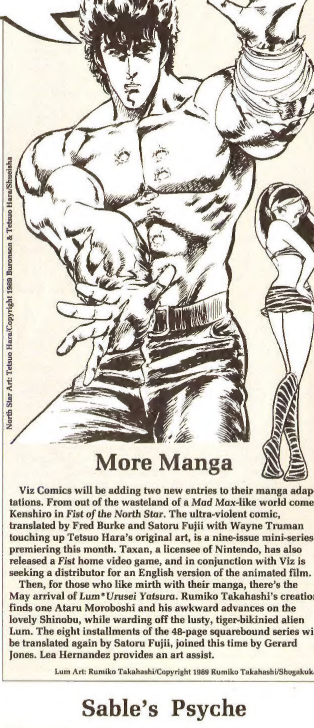
There are, of course, differences between writing the movie's Batman and the DC Comics original. "My approach was to do a good kick-ass Batman story within the established continuity," Hamm says. "Writing the movie was a one-shot thing to present the character to a new audience. Writing the comic book was writing for an audience with a working vocabulary of the character. I didn't have to worry about making the different parts of the mythos play and was able to throw in lots of souvenirs in the Batcave, lots of Alfred and Commissioner Gordon.

"I had too much plot for the story. With a comic script, I was locked into a specific number of pages. I couldn't really keep going and trim later. I would get to a chapter's end and still have too much plot so I would just cram it into the final pages. That's why you'll notice pages with eight panels at the end of each issue."

Curiously, Hamm originally expressed his desire to write DC's Batman in an interview published in COMICS SCENE #3. He ponders the issue's role as a possible catalyst.

"COMICS SCENE never came up by name, but I figure they read the same magazines I do," Sam Hamm says. "I read in COMICS SCENE #1 that Denny liked my script enough to let me write a Batman comic; then he probably read in CS #3 that I would love to do it. I'm confident COMICS SCENE was the agent through which this was provoked."

—Carr D'Angelo



North Star Art: Tetsuo Hara/Copyright 1988 Buronson & Tetsuo Hara/Shueisha

More Manga

Viz Comics will be adding two new entries to their manga adaptations. From out of the wasteland of a *Mad Max*-like world comes Kenshiro in *Fist of the North Star*. The ultra-violent comic, translated by Fred Burke and Satoru Fujii with Wayne Truman touching up Tetsuo Hara's original art, is a nine-issue mini-series premiering this month. Taxan, a licensee of Nintendo, has also released a *Fist* home video game, and in conjunction with Viz is seeking a distributor for an English version of the animated film.

Then, for those who like mirth with their manga, there's the May arrival of *Lum*Urusei Yatsura*. Rumiko Takahashi's creation finds one Ataru Moroboshi and his awkward advances on the lovely Shinobu, while warding off the lusty, tiger-bikinied alien Lum. The eight installments of the 48-page squarebound series will be translated again by Satoru Fujii, joined this time by Gerard Jones. Lea Hernandez provides an art assist.

Lum Art: Rumiko Takahashi/Copyright 1988 Rumiko Takahashi/Shogakukan

Sable's Psyche

Thousands of couples prefer to schedule their weddings for the spring, but, warns Marv Wolfman, Jon Sable and Myke Blackmon won't be among those speaking their vows during these coming months.

"About April, there should be a major change in the relationship between Jon and Myke," the writer reveals. "The two of them are going to be splitting. Myke is pregnant with Jon's child, but she doesn't tell him this and she leaves.

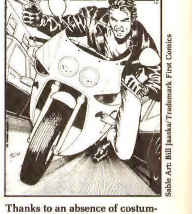
"She *will* have the child as well. There's not going to be some last-minute termination, no horseback riding, no falling down steps. The kid will be born and in fine health."

The fearless freelance, meanwhile, was supposed to have recognized that perhaps he had finally encountered a problem he couldn't handle in his usual manner. And given the trauma he has carried with him since his first family's death, Wolfman thought it would be only natural for Sable to seek professional advice. However, he quickly "realized Jon would *never* go to a psychiatrist.

"So, what I have is a really interesting plot where a female psychiatrist hires him. She can't tell him who the murderer is because the murderer is a client of hers, but she can tell Jon who the victim is going to be. So, Jon has to protect somebody from someone he doesn't know. I was so pleased with that one because it not only set up a nice story for *Sable*, but it also begins the relationship between Jon and this woman.

"When [First Comics publisher] Rick Obadiah offered this to me, it was the only book at First I would have taken because I really liked Mike Grell's *Sable*. When you do a great deal of superhero material, as I do, you do a certain type of work. It's not really real world material. In *Sable*, the character can't be superhuman. He doesn't have an arsenal of every weapon ever created. *Nothing* can happen in it that technically could not really happen." Admits Marv Wolfman, "I took it on because originally I needed the work. Now, I keep it even though I've got plenty of work because I really enjoy plotting *Sable*."

—Daniel Dickholtz



Sable Art: Bill Jaaska/Trademark First Comics

Thanks to an absence of costumed supervillains, Marv Wolfman admits, "I've done some of my best plotting on *Sable*."

What If Art: Al Milgrom/Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 Marvel Entertainment

Revisionist History

When the Watcher now wonders *What If?*, he has to make do with fewer pages to rewrite Marvel's history than he had in his previous series. But sharing the book's 32 pages with shorter "special 'happy ending' type stories like 'What if Scott and Jean had settled down and flowers came up everywhere?' " and humorous featurettes will never affect the quality of his more serious pontifications, promises Editor Craig Anderson.

With every issue, Anderson states, "*What If?* essentially has to take a sharp turn around a left corner into areas that we aren't aware of and that we wouldn't even expect. That's what makes it enjoyable. No one will suspect where these stories are going."

They might, however, detect a certain trend in the types of tales the title will be featuring. A host of writers and artists, including Roy Thomas, Dan Fingeroth, Jim Valentino, Dave Simons and Mark Bagley, will craft alternate realities wherein Daredevil killed the Kingpin, Steve Rogers never surrendered his Captain America identity, and Spider-Man never removed his symbiotic alien costume. Some of the Watcher's other visions, unscheduled as yet, reveal what might have occurred had the X-Men been defeated in the Inferno, the Punisher's family not perished, Wolverine become a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, and Iron Man lost his Armor Wars.

"The general thrust of this book is to keep current," Anderson admits. "The original *What If?* pretty much mined any vein of old material there was, and that material goes back 25 years now. Our fans today, for the most part, have only been reading comics in the 1980s, so we wanted to do stories that are more topical to them. We will be doing stories that deal with events from the '60s [such as Valentino's tales in which Wonder Man never met his "demise" and the Vision crushes the Avengers in their first meeting], but as a rule, we're going with more current events.

"It's good to see characters do things that they wouldn't be able to do otherwise," says Anderson, "particularly get married and live happily ever after or die or be stripped of their powers."

Agrees Assistant Editor Sue Flaxman, "It's like a fantasy beyond the fantasy."

—*Daniel Dickholtz*

New Fantastic Foursomes

Walt Simonson has a new job: chronicling the adventures of the *Fantastic Four*. He made no bones about leaving his assignment writing *The Avengers* because it had ceased to be fun for him. So, why did he agree to pick up the double reins—both writing and drawing—the self-proclaimed "World's Greatest Comics Magazine"?

"I decided *Fantastic Four* would be interesting to do, partly because it's different from *Thor*," Simonson admits. "*Thor* is a book that, in some ways for me, looks backward, to the time before science and ordinary men, a time when all men were giants and gods walked the Earth. In *Thor*, I took a conservative approach, visually because that's the way I viewed the character. But with *FF*, it's so full of super science—a radical cube for getting into the Negative Zone, and all that stuff that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby came up with—that it's really a forward-looking book. It makes a nice contrast to get into that kind of science-fantasy.

"Now, with Reed and Sue having been members of both the Avengers and the FF—though they were Avengers for all of three minutes—in terms of the continuity, I'll be able to segue into those stories pretty easily on *FF*," Simonson continues. "My original plan wasn't for their Avengers status to be so short-term, but it's going to work out all right now. I think I'll be able to take off almost immediately with the Kang story and the time bubble that I touched on in *The Avengers*.

"I knew Marvel would like to have the FF's core group back in working order," says Walt Simonson, "and I have nothing against that."

—*Patrick Daniel O'Neill*

Vox Art: John Byrne/Copyright 1989 Apple Comics

"Vox" Populi

He's Vox, a space trucker in love with his ship, but without the money to keep her. They're with the Alliance and willing to pay him to be a test subject for a new matter transmitter. Somebody obviously doesn't want the Alliance to have it. If that wasn't enough, John Byrne has done the cover for the premiere of Angela Harris and Aaron McClellan's seven-issue mini-series from Apple.

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THE PUNISHER

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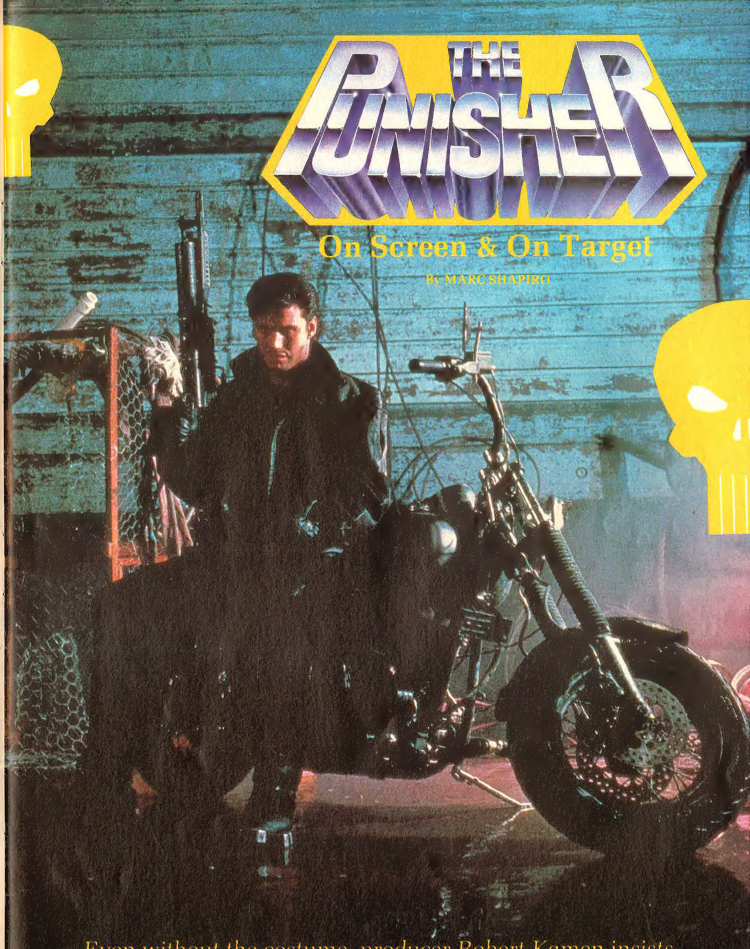


Even without the costume, producer Robert Kamen insists that the grim gunslinger has been shot in a favorable light.

Art: Jim Lee

Producer Robert Kamen's argument for the change in the Punisher's traditional garb is that the film "would have looked too much like a comic book."

The Punisher recently faced his toughest battle when the film version of comicdom's favorite killing machine squared off against a theater full of hardcore Punisher types at a secret test screening. And as Robert Kamen, the film's producer and uncredited co-writer, recalls, the crimebuster took a few lumps.

"The audience was split right down the middle," reports Kamen. "Half of them were upset that we got rid of the original Punisher costume and half were glad we did. A good part of the audience was upset that the Punisher was no longer this one-dimensional killing machine and there were others who were glad we had given him some character."

Kamen is dropping these test results during an early morning breakfast in a Hollywood hotel. Between spoonfuls of oatmeal, Kamen, the brains behind the *Karate Kid* series, is extolling the virtues of this latest entry in the comic-book-to-film sweepstakes and thanking his lucky stars for an August release date.

"We would get trampled for sure if we had to open this movie opposite *Batman*, *Indiana Jones III* and *Ghostbusters II*," comments the producer. "By the time we open in August, the heat will have died down and *The Punisher* will have a chance to reach its audience."

The Punisher, a New World release which stars Dolph (*Masters of the Universe*) Lundgren as the title anti-hero, would appear to have more than a wing and a prayer going for it and, when Kamen drops his cautious facade, he gives the blood-and-guts particulars.

"The movie is the essence of the comic book," observes Kamen. "It starts with an explosion and has a violent or action sequence just about every four minutes. When the Punisher is in a scene with another person, he kills him. When he's around a car or a building, he blows it up. The only time the Punisher appears is when violence is about to happen."

But it was not the Punisher's ability to rearrange human anatomy that drew Kamen to the project not long after beginning a development deal in 1987 with New World Pictures, then-owner of Marvel Comics.

"What attracted me to the Punisher was that he was *not* a superhero," says Kamen of his contact with a first draft script by Boaz Yakin. "He was this human being who had been roughed up by fate, cast up on the shore and left to find his own way. Take away the suit with the skull on it and you end up with a very tormented, yet very human being, and that is fascinating.

"What struck me as interesting about the Punisher is that he's in a constant turmoil about his crusade of vengeance. He still needs to believe in a just God who wants the guilty punished, and so, while he's blowing away every bad guy in sight, he's looking for guidance, a guidance that never seems to come."

Eventually, Kamen did a major rewrite of the *Punisher* script.

"After the second draft, it just became too difficult to keep the writer on the project," the producer laments. "We were having a hard time finding a director who would do the script's original draft and the main reason was that the writer was one of those guys who was adamant about keeping the movie true to the comic. If we did that, we would have ended up with an unredemptive hero without a conscience. That would definitely *not* work within a movie's context.

"So, I stepped in and rewrote the dialogue and structure of the script. And based on my rewrite, we got a director and a go on the picture."

Kamen claims that Mark (*Dead Heat*) Goldblatt was the ideal choice for director. "He's an action director who understands how to bring a hard action edge to a film."

"Lundgren took on so much of the Punisher's character that he got downright weird during filming," Kamen reports.

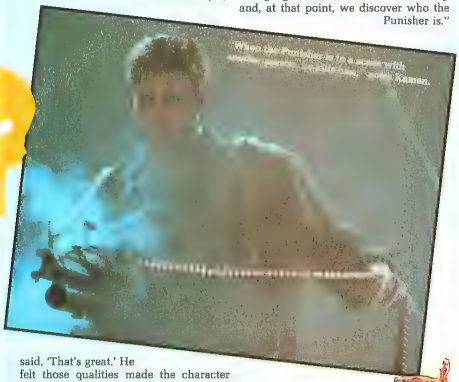
All Punisher Movie Photos: Copyright 1989, New World Pictures

The producer recalls, however, that finding an actor to play the Punisher proved to be a punishing task.

"We needed a big guy who was good in action scenes and who could act and come across as somebody on the edge," explains Kamen. "We also had the disadvantage of not being backed by a big studio. You would be surprised how often people in the acting community will run from a comic-book role when it isn't a Universal or Warner Bros. film. Many names were thrown around."

Until the casting spotlight finally stopped on Dolph Lundgren.

"Dolph didn't exactly jump at the role," concedes Kamen. "He was hesitant. But when we explained that we wanted him to drop 25 pounds, dye his hair dark and live in a sewer, he said, 'That's great.' He felt those qualities made the character more human."



Kamen recalls that Lundgren seemed to seize *The Punisher* as an opportunity to finally prove he was capable of more than dancing deltoids and macho posturing.

"Once he accepted the role, he took it very seriously. He read all the *Punisher* comic books and totally submerged himself in the character. In fact, Lundgren took on so much of the Punisher's character that he got downright weird during filming.

"He would walk around the set with this Punisher look on his face. He would stare off into space and not talk to anybody. It was like he was in the character and *nobody* was going to shake him out of it."

Kamen claims that Lundgren proved capable of more than waving weapons in the bad guys' faces. The producer claims Lundgren was also impressive in scenes that required him to be tender with his wife and kids.

The Punisher, which also features Louis Gossett Jr. and Jeroen (*The Living Daylights*) Krabbe, began filming in Australia in June 1988. Shot in 50 days on an $11 million budget, *The Punisher*, rather than taking the easy way out and just doing the origin story, begins years after the fact.

"We kick in five years after Frank Castle has already been The Punisher," reports Kamen. "The head of the Mafia family, Tony Franco [Krabbe], who was responsible for the death of Castle's family, is just leaving the courthouse after being acquitted of killing Castle and his family. As Franco's limo pulls away, we catch the shot of a boot with a skull-handled dagger in it. We pull back to a motorcycle which follows the limo. Franco's gang is killed, a house is blown up and, at that point, we discover who the Punisher is."

Art: Jim Lee

Through a flashback, aided and abetted by the introduction of partner Jake Berkowitz [Gossett], we relive the Punisher's origin and watch as a worn-out and confused Castle wages a two-pronged assault against the Mafia and the incursion of its Japanese counterpart, the Yakuza.

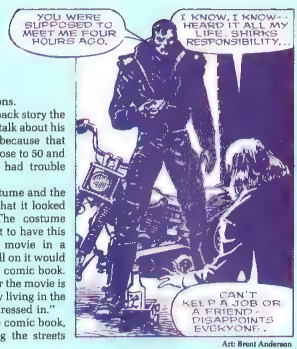
Lundgren had previously described the *Punisher* experience as "*Lethal Weapon* meets *The Terminator*."

"That sounds like something Dolph would say," chuckles Kamen, "and it does sound like the movie we came up with. But it's ultimately the *essence* of the comic book."

Kamen, also responsible for the *Karate Kid* films, admits that "the *Punisher* movie is the essence of the comic book."

Art: Bill Reinhold

Frank Castle will also be out of costume for Marvel's movie adaptation.


YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO MEET ME FOUR HOURS AGO.
I KNOW, I KNOW— I HEARD IT ALL. MY LIFE SHIRKS RESPONSIBILITY.
CAN'T KEEP A JOB OR A FRIEND— DISAPPOINTS EVERYONE.

Art: Brent Anderson

With some minor alterations.

"We've basically kept the back story the same, but we decided not to talk about his being a hero in Vietnam, because that would make the character close to 50 and I think Dolph would have had trouble playing 50.

"We also changed the costume and the reason we changed it was that it looked *silly*," Kamen explains. "The costume works in the comic book but to have this guy running around in a movie in a spandex costume with a skull on it would have looked too much like a comic book. The costume we designed for the movie is what you'd expect somebody living in the sewers of New York to be dressed in."

Kamen offers that, like the comic book, *The Punisher* will be hitting the streets woman-free.

"No, the Punisher will *not* fall in love," the producer vows. "This movie is made for the hardcore *Punisher* audience, so we're not going to throw in a love scene that would only be contrived. The only emotions the Punisher feels are revenge and confusion."

New World's only emotions, though, were joy when Goldblatt and Kamen brought *The Punisher* in on time and on budget.

"And that wasn't easy, because there are many stunts and action sequences in this film. Many things could only be shot once because it would have been impossible to rig it a second time.

"There's this scene where a house is on fire and the script called for the Punisher to stand in the doorway just before it explodes. Dolph did that and almost all of his other stunts, but we were concerned not only for his safety on that scene, but also because we didn't have another house to blow up.

"We have a sequence where the Punisher pins a guy to a wall with an arrow that has a line attached to it. The Punisher is then supposed to slide down the line, firing away with his guns. Dolph was great about that scene. He got up on the building, said, 'Here I go,' and went for it. I didn't want to be the one to tell Dolph that we had to do that stunt again, so I was glad the four cameras we had on him got everything."

The producer follows up the oatmeal with a danish as he turns the conversation toward another project, the third installment of *The Karate Kid* series. It's not comics-based, of course, but DC Comics did end up selling Columbia Pictures rights to their *Legion* character Karate Kid, so that the first (and subsequent) *Kid* movies didn't have to be re-titled. As open mouthed as the producer is about *Punisher* particulars, that's how lockjawed he is about *Karate Kid III* specifics.

"But here's the toe-dance version," joshes Kamen. "Daniel and Mr. Miyogi have a falling out and Daniel begins studying with an evil karate teacher. We've got the same actors, director from the first two *Karate Kid* movies. Even the grips from the first two made themselves available to do this one."

Returning to *The Punisher*, Kamen indicates that a box office smash might also mean another *Punisher* mission.

"There is no treatment for a second movie, but I would have no problem doing another one if this film does well. There has been talk of a second *Punisher* movie being an expansion of one of the comic-book stories. We've left the door open for a sequel, but not in an intentional manner. This film ends with a major conflict and Frank Castle disappears."

Something that won't disappear is the ongoing romance between comic-book characters and moviemakers. It's a trend that many feel *The Punisher* is joining a little late.

"I don't agree," concludes Robert Kamen. "We're not just tossing out another superhero in cape and tights. The Punisher doesn't change into a costume in a phone booth and fly. He's this demented character who talks to God, lives in the sewer and wears tattered black leather. What we have in the Punisher is the ultimate anti-hero:

"A not-very-nice person who rides a beat-up Harley and carries big guns."

"What attracted me to the Punisher was that he was *not* a superhero," says Robert Kamen (on the far left).

Art: Brent Anderson

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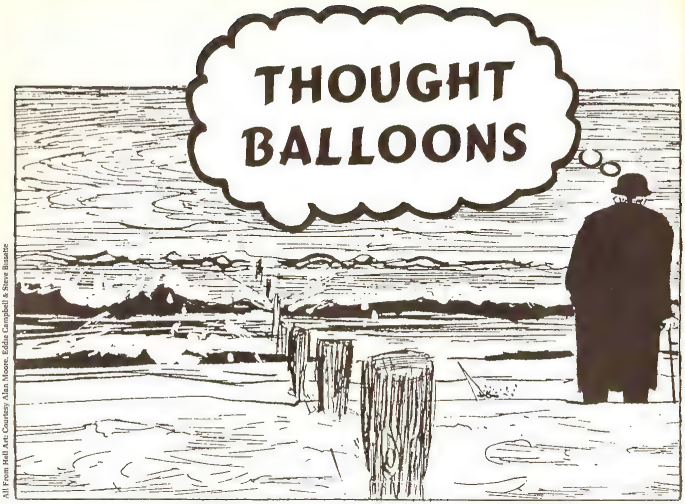

All From Hell Art: Courtesy Alan Moore, Eddie Campbell & Steve Bissette

Alan Moore's Watchwords

As creator of an adventurous anarchist, Alan Moore's attitudes toward censorship should come as no surprise. When DC contemplated instituting a ratings system, Moore publicly attacked it. While the political atmosphere of modern England grew more oppressive, Moore found the weaponry and strength he needed to step up his futuristic anarchist's attacks in the concluding chapters of V for Vendetta. *And as the British government attempted to introduce legislation intended to eliminate their own gay communities, Moore retaliated by forming his own publishing company and producing* A.A.R.G.H. *(Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia), the proceeds of which were given to the Organization of Lesbian and Gay Action.*

Still, there are media-spawned products that Moore himself finds objectionable. "I feel badly about the values that are pushed at my children and other members of my society by way of things as diverse as Barbara Cartland novels, the cavalier approach to violence in an awful lot of comics and books, the glorification of warfare in a great many television programs and films. The Rambo *films, for example, seem to me to be morally abhorrent," he admits. However, unlike those extremists, the writer—his latest work,* From Hell, *is being serialized, appropriately enough, in* Taboo*—recognizes that there are alternatives to the "simple" removal of all offensive material. After all, he notes, "If you're going to allow censorship, you must be prepared for people coming along and taking away everything you hold dear."*

ALAN MOORE: My feelings upon censorship are that it is wrong, full stop. It is a thing which I utterly oppose. I believe that there is nothing in this world that is unsayable. It is not information which is dangerous, it is the lack of information which is dangerous.

The example that I always cite is still the one which means the most to me. When she was five, my daughter came home from school, asking for some money for a collection. I assumed it was for collie dogs for the blind or something like that, and I gave her some money and asked what it was for. She said it was for a school friend of hers who was in the hospital. I asked what was wrong with him, and apparently, his older brother had gone berserk with a bread knife and killed his mother and then turned upon him. And I stood there with my jaw hanging open down to my chest. This was a five-year-old telling me this, and there is no way short of following my daughter around in an armored car or putting her in a bank vault for the remainder of her life that I can protect her from knowing about the sort of stuff that goes down in this world.

Now, the only thing that I *can* give my children that's going to be

All From Hell Art: Eddie Campbell

Don't you ever feel GUILTY?
We could have SAID something. We could have DONE something. WHY, Fred?
Why did we just let them BURY it?
Because we didn't want our throats cut.
Because we didn't want our lights hung over our shoulders
Give us a hand up these steps would ya?

They weren't the only ones to feel the thing *From Hell*'s touch. As Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell will reveal over the story's 16 installments, even the Elephant Man and Buffalo Bill didn't survive unscathed.

of any help them in life at all is information, to tell them what exists in the world and to give them a concrete text by which they can approach and understand it. Amber is only just starting to comfortably read, and Leah, the older child, can read almost anything. She has read *Watchmen* four or five times, she has read Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. If she comes in and happens to see an underground comic with a bright cover and asks to read it, if there is any sex, any ugly or distressing sexual content in it, I'll tell her that there is, that the sex stuff in it isn't meant to be taken literally, and that she might not want to read it. I'll tell her that if she wants to read it, she can, and that if there's anything in it that bothers or puzzles her, she should come to me and talk about it. I would like to think that I have a relationship with my children within the framework of which I can talk about anything. If that means that my children might eventually come across bad pornography or bad material of another nature, then I would prefer to have built up a relationship with them so that they'll have a context in which and by which to judge that sort of material.

I prefer doing that to getting into the dangerous territory of saying that I wish to suppress this material so that my children can't see it or so somebody else can't see it. Because when you get into that area, you're really starting to head into troubled waters.

I've heard an awful lot of feminists, for example, calling for a ban on pornography because they perceive it as being insulting and degrading in its approach to women. No doubt with a lot of child pornography, that's absolutely true. But you're taking a dangerous step if you go on from there and ban the material because then you are in effect saying that all censorship is right, and you cannot turn around if someone starts to censor you and say, "Hey, look, this isn't fair!"

You must be consistent about it. Feminists who wish to censor pornography should think what it would be like in a fundamentalist society that believed a woman's place was as according to the Bible: under man and in the kitchen. If the feminist literature was seen to be socially corrosive, then I could imagine that there are several right-wing groups which could make just as persuasive an argument for the banning of all feminist literature as feminists can make for the banning of all pornography.

Now, unless we're going to have total silence, the only other option is total noise. One of my responsibilities as an artist is to keep the noise level up.

If I dislike the *Rambo* films, then I've got the option of making as much noise as I can in an effort to redress the balance. If the *Rambo* films are putting over one view of the world, I can use whatever means are open to me to put forward a countering view of the world. And that is all that I have a moral right to do. I don't have the right to picket Sylvester Stallone films. I don't have the right to try and stop films like *Rambo* from being made, much as I despise them. If I were to insist upon that right for my own reasons, then I couldn't expect my own right to free speech to continue being extended to me.

That, to me, is the essential thing. If there is something you do not like, presumably you can articulate your reasons. If you really believe in what you're saying, presumably you can put as good a case against the values shown in any particular work as that work itself puts for its own values. That is the proper way to do things, not to try to get a government body to do your moral policing for you, not to hand responsibility for what you or other people can or cannot read to some outside party and let them make all the decisions. That is very, very dangerous. We already have certain strict information controls within our society. I don't think we really need to add to them.

We're living in a world where we have a capacity to annihilate the entire population, something we pay our tax dollars and pounds to support. Our own government and those of other countries carry out this lethal, hideous, grotesque ballet, often in secret, to support *their* interests, involving the deaths of thousands of people and the erasing of square mile upon square mile of property. These things can happen, and somehow, we don't seem to get too excited about the fact that they happen and continue to happen. We don't put a strong effort into actually eradicating some of the looming social evils that are actually destroying people's lives. But *censorship*. . . Let somebody show a nipple in the wrong place, let somebody use language that offends good Christian, Presbyterian values, let somebody refer to a sexual act which, though millions of people worldwide might carry it out regularly in the privacy of their own homes, is still not fit to be mentioned, and people will suddenly find the energy to rise up in arms and take up moral cudgels against this atrocity. I find it very suspect that people can get so excited about things so relatively unimportant when they can only respond with apathy to the genuine evils of the world.

Daniel Dickholtz

The more fascinating menace is what Abberline and Lees had seen 35 years before this tale's prologue, an *actual* horror that seemed to come directly *From Hell*.

All From Hell Art: Copyright 1989 Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell

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LOONEY TUNES

And Friz Freleng

A WARNER BROS. CARTOON

The Pink Panther's theme and all those other Merrie Melodies are still music to this legendary animator's ears.

Pink Artist Sites

Tickled Pink Art: Courtesy & Copyright 1989 MGM/UA Video

Photo: Jennifer Williams

BY JAMIE BERNARD

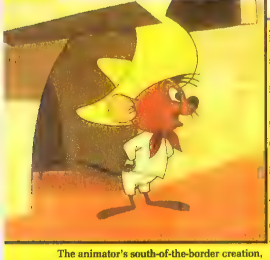
It's Thanksgiving, and Friz Freleng is sitting in a New York hotel room with a panoramic view of Broadway. Just recently, that view was taken up with something extremely large, pink, silent, stealthy and very dear to Freleng's heart: The Pink Panther.

The animated character just made his first appearance as a balloon in the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and now a publicist has strewn the hotel suite with smaller stuffed replicas of Freleng's 25-year-old Oscar-winning feline. There are three Pink Panthers on the bed, dressed in black tuxedo jackets and silver bowties; there is a giant Pink Panther leaning against the couch, his tail curling toward the coffee table; there are five signed limited edition Pink Panther "cels"—paintings on celluloid that are used to make animated film—propped against the wall.

The 82-year-old animator doesn't need these overblown reminders; he remembers drawing the first Panther as if it were yesterday. When asked about his favorite cartoon character, he names

Life imitated art at this past Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York as that sophisticated feline took to the skyline.

Bugs & Sam in Bar Cel Arts. Fritz Freleng/Copyright 1987 Warner Bros. Inc./Courtesy Circle Art



Art Copyright 1985 Warner Bros./Courtesy Warner Home Video

The animator's south-of-the-border creation, "Speedy Gonzales," outdistanced the competition, winning the Oscar race in 1955.

Pink. And this from a man who created Porky Pig, Sylvester, Yosemite Sam and Speedy Gonzales.

"What happened with the Pink Panther, of course, is that I designed that thing for a title," explains Freleng a little unnecessarily. After all, the pantomime panther who prowled under the credits of Blake Edwards' *The Pink Panther* in 1964 went on to become more famous in its way than the series of Peter Sellers detective farces. "When I designed it, I spoke to Blake and said, 'I'm going to do this whole thing to music. What's the music going to be?' He said, 'I don't know. Henry Mancini is going to do the music.' So, he sent Henry Mancini over to see me, and I asked him, 'Henry, what's the music going to be?' And Henry answered, 'Well, I have no idea.' I said, 'At least give me a beat. I'll do it to the beat.' So, he said, 'Well, let me think.' Then . . ." Freleng snaps his fingers rhythmically. "He said, 'That's it,' and he walked out."

Inauspicious beginnings. Freleng, who had in his time adroitly linked up Bugs Bunny to the music of Franz Liszt, bought a metronome, tried his best to remember the pulse of Mancini's snap, designed a suave, lanky panther and made him move at about 12 frames to the beat. He gave Mancini the pencil test—the animation equivalent of a rough draft—and the next time he visited the composer, a 40-piece orchestra played for Freleng what everyone can hum today: *Dum, de dum, de dum de dum de dum . .*

"When that reached the screens, of course, it made a big hit," concludes Freleng in that mild, understated way that all the old-time animators seem to have when discussing the underpaid work that was once considered as disposable as fast food, and has now been elevated to high art. Like jazz, the animated cartoon is peculiarly American, and also like jazz, it has taken some time to be accepted as "serious" work. Of course, original cels are now fetching thousands of serious dollars at art galleries; Freleng's limited editions go for several hundred at places like T.R.'s Circle Gallery in New York, which hosted the reception for Freleng after the Panther's balloon debut.

The Panther was created after the Warners animation studio closed in 1963. Freleng teamed with Dave DePatie to form DePatie-Freleng Enterprises, which made TV specials and cartoons.

However, the Panther once cost Freleng a job. "Producers came to us to do titles for their movies," recalls the animator, "and [producer/director] Billy Wilder called me in to do the title for one of his. I started to do it in a storyboard. In the meantime, *Time* magazine came out with a review of *The Pink Panther* that

"People like someone who's a winner all the time. That's what they like to see in Bugs," Freleng says. "Yosemite Sam is a loser."

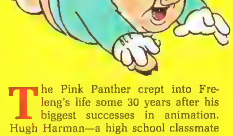
said the best part of the picture was the title. So, Billy Wilder called me up and told me, 'I don't want a title better'n my picture, so cancel that order.' "

The Panther found new life as a star of theater shorts, financed by United Artists.

The first cartoon, "The Pink Phink," won an Oscar.

"That really launched it. I think I did about 190 before we quit making them." Freleng personally directed the first dozen or so; when the networks began buying them for TV broadcast, Freleng farmed out the work to his staff. "It got to be too expensive to make, and then the theaters started cutting out the short subjects altogether because they were selling candy and popcorn, and since they were making more money on those things, they didn't have to run the shorts. And then, of course, the shorts went into television as kids' shows. Now, the Pink Panther seems to be more popular in Europe than here: their audience is more sophisticated, I guess."

Although the animators at Disney are known for jumping through hoops in order to get the movements of an animal down correctly, Freleng reveals the Panther "came from the gut. He has *nothing* to do with panthers, he's mostly human. Most of our characters are based on humans. They're abstract designs, with human movements and human voices. That's what they are, really. The more abstract they're drawn, and the more abstract they are, the more the audience enjoys them. Why? I can't explain."



The Pink Panther crept into Freleng's life some 30 years after his biggest successes in animation. Hugh Harman—a high school classmate of Isidore Freleng back in Kansas City who gave Freleng his lifelong nickname of Friz, after the fictitious Congressman Frizbee from a column in the *Los Angeles Examiner*—brought his buddy out to California to work for Disney. There, Freleng got his feet wet on Oswald the Rabbit, a sketchy precursor to Mickey Mouse. He left Disney after only two months, even before the birth of *Snow White*.

"I couldn't take it. You did what *Disney* wanted to do. You couldn't do what *you* wanted to do. It had to be just Disney, you

On Stage with Tweety & Sylvester Cel Art: Friz Freleng/Copyright 1987 Warner Bros. Inc. /Courtesy Cinefx Fine Art

had to think like Disney, do what Disney did, and I wasn't that kind of a guy. I had to do my own thing."

After a stint with Walter Lantz, the creator of Woody Woodpecker (STARLOG #96), Freleng became one of the first animation directors at the Leon Schlesinger Studio, the place that would come to define and hone the short-form cartoon under the aegis of Warners. Freleng, who would go on to direct approximately 266 Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies—more than anyone else—shared the early hutch with Harman and Rudolph Ising, who would become the team that their names had destined them for: Harman-Ising.

In 1935, Freleng directed a cartoon with a new character, one Porky Pig, in "I Haven't Got a Hat." It was Warners' first cartoon star. Bob Clampett would later streamline the pig into a more attractive character, but in Freleng's seminal short, Porky was extremely porcine, and, since this was before Mel Blanc took over Porky's voice, his stutter was almost painfully overdone.

Freleng left Warners for MGM for two years, lured away by the bucks—$375 a week as opposed to $250—but returned in 1939. Among his best-known Warners cartoons is "You Oughta Be in Pictures," a combination of animation and live-action many decades before *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. In this one, Porky leaves the Schlesinger Studio to try to make it as a leading man, or in his case, pig. Another famous Freleng cartoon, "Rhapsody in Rivets," represents his first use of Franz Liszt music, in which a foreman conducts the building of a skyscraper by synchronized animals.

Freleng also won three Oscars for the studio, for "Speedy Gonzales," "Birds Anonymous" and "Knighty Knight Bugs." An animated documentary on publicly financed health centers, which Freleng wrote along with Chuck Jones, also earned an Oscar.

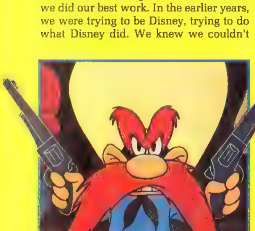
Among the concepts that made Freleng an outstanding director was his

Bros. at First Sight Art Courtesy & Copyright 1988 MGM/UA Video

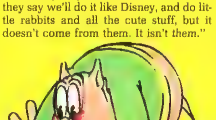
"He has *nothing* to do with panthers, he's mostly human," says Freleng, explaining Pink's magnetism.

pairing of his creation Sylvester the Cat with Tweety Bird. Although Freleng didn't actually invent Tweety, "I redesigned him and gave him a different personality." He did, however, create Speedy Gonzales and Yosemite Sam.

"We were young enough to have fun doing anything, because when you're young, that's the way things are. I think it showed in the pictures," says Freleng of the early Warners years. "Once we set the style for the characters and their personalities, we continued that when we got older, too. In fact, I think we did it better as we went along. In the '40s and '50s, we did our best work. In the earlier years, we were trying to be Disney, trying to do what Disney did. We knew we couldn't beat Disney at his own game, so we did our own thing, and we began to do this thing better than we knew how to do. We weren't imitating anymore. Now, everybody's imitating us, and they can't get it right. That's what happened with Disney things [like *Oliver & Company*]—they're imitating the old Disney, trying to be Disney, and they're *not*. Everybody wants to be a success, they say we'll do it like Disney, and do little rabbits and all the cute stuff, but it doesn't come from them. It isn't *them*."



Yosemite Sam's cameo in *Roger Rabbit* didn't sway Freleng. He thinks the film was "way over-animated."



Freleng isn't much impressed with the new animation around town. He found *Roger Rabbit* "way over-animated, if you're talking technically. What it did to the movie was that I didn't follow the story, because Roger Rabbit was such a distraction from the dialogue. You're charmed by the animation and its tricks, but as far as the story is concerned, your interest in the show, you lose it."

He admits that *Roger Rabbit* has sparked a resurgence of interest in the art, but after seeing a trailer for the new Disney feature *Oliver & Company*, he's not too hopeful. His wife chimes in that she thought the *Oliver* trailer looked cute. Freleng bristles.

"She doesn't understand what I understand," he says. "And the average person doesn't understand. They say, 'Oh, it's a Disney film,' and they go to see it. But I don't think this is a Disney film. Disney has the name on it, but I don't think it's a Disney. I just look at it and I can tell. Look at the way *Lady and the Tramp* was done, the personalities that came out of those characters. I could tell that this just didn't do it."

He's also not surprised that the human figures in *Oliver & Company* look flat. "Humans are the *hardest* things to do in animation, and that's why Disney didn't do them. He had his problems when they made *Sleeping Beauty*, as hard as they tried. Girls they could do with flowing animation, but when they had a male . . ." Freleng lowers his voice. "Because the movements were smooth, they just couldn't get that masculine look."

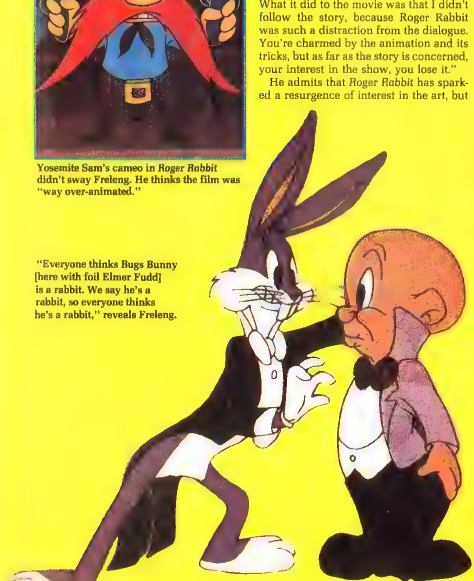
Freleng is on a roll; he gesticulates with his hands. "There's more to just an outline of a human that gives them a personality. An abstract thing like a dog, you can make them act human, talk like humans. They don't act like dogs. They may walk and move like them, but their expressions are human expressions. Everyone thinks Bugs Bunny is a rabbit. But really, he stands on his two legs, he has hands. Sure, he has ears and lives in a hole, and we say he's a rabbit, so everyone thinks he's a rabbit. They don't stop to think, 'Well, he doesn't even *look* like a rabbit.' "

No, he sums up, the only Disney humans that ever worked were the dwarfs, "and they weren't human, really. They were abstractions, too."

The recent surge of interest in the Warners cartoons Freleng attributes to Baby Boomer nostalgia. Their initial success, however, he traces to two things: having a theater audience to share the laughter, and being made for adults in the first place. "We *never* had a child in mind when we made them," he says. "In fact, when they were made available for television, the first time it came out was at nighttime, but that lasted about a year, and they decided to drop it off as children's programming. But these were never designed for children."

All the cartoons were tested on live, adult audiences he says, so the animators could learn what worked and what didn't. "They were designed for an audience. They were designed to get a reaction, and laughter is contagious. That's why you see so many laugh tracks today. We would run it for the group at whatever time we finished, and they reacted almost like your theater audience. Of course, some of the things were inside jokes that a regular audience wouldn't

(continued on page 41)



"Everyone thinks Bugs Bunny [here with foil Elmer Fudd] is a rabbit. We say he's a rabbit, so everyone thinks he's a rabbit," reveals Freleng.

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THE GUNS OF CHUCK DIXON

Can the battling scribe survive an onslaught of aliens & artists?

Photos: Steve Downs

Doing Winnie the Pooh, Raggedy Ann and other "children's books kept me uptight about violence," Chuck Dixon says. "I was able to let loose when I got into comics."

"Skywolf is like the crazy uncle who takes you out to party when your parents would rather you stay home," notes Dixon.

By DANIEL DICKHOLTZ

Outside of a city now so buried by the sands of time that no trace can be found of its existence, a grim warrior prepares to test both his sinews and steel against a beast summoned from some hidden corner of hell. Modern-day skies are torn asunder by a bat-winged jet, its teenage pilot desperately evading a fiery swarm of tracer bullets. And on a world orbiting a star yet to be discovered, pools of oddly colored blood well up on a field where hostile forces clash with a democracy that stretches across three galaxies. These are hardly provinces where a man who once anonymously wrote children's novels would be expected to venture, yet Chuck Dixon finds himself at ease in all of them.

"I never want to bore the reader," says Dixon. "That's what I'm always afraid of. I've thrown away entire issues of *Airboy* that didn't move fast enough. My philosophy has always been: If you want to have characterization, have them talk while they fight. I want to see what a character does rather than what he's thinking about."

Art: Chuck Austen

All Airboy Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 Eclipse Comics

PUERTO MONIFICO... FORMERLY CAPITAL CITY OF BOSANTILLA
A CITY IN THE PROCESS OF RECONSTRUCTION AFTER YEARS OF WAR...
ALL BUT THIS STRUCTURE.
VILLA MISERIO
THIS PLACE STILL GIVES ME THE CREEPS
THE RAINBOW SAID THIS WOULD BE THE PLACE TO ENTER MISERIO'S DOMAIN. THE PLACE WHERE HIS PRESENCE ON EARTH WAS JUST FELT.

"So many of today's characters become cynical and downbeat," Dixon notes. "I'd like to have Airboy be unsullied."

Busy with more than a dozen projects that he's doing for nearly as many publishing companies, including the one he owns with Tim Truman (COMICS SCENE #4-5), Dixon is now seeing what he can do with *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* for Marvel, a book he discussed in detail last issue.

"He's my first mainstream superheroic character," Dixon notes, "and I'm having fun with that. Spector is constantly frustrated because so many people know that he's Moon Knight. Also, because there are so many superheroes in New York, people are calling him Moon Beam, Moon Shine. He's always saying, 'Well, no, I'm Moon *Knight*,' doing public relations for himself. I want him to be a regular guy who depends on the costume, but who's constantly questioning, 'Why *do* I wear this?'

"I tend to think too literally for superhero comics," laughs Dixon. "Moon Knight's probably the only one I should do because he doesn't have any superpowers and I don't have to deal with him facing Galactus. These kinds of books take a leap of faith to read and I realize the readers will be along with you as long as you keep entertaining them, but I question these things too much."

Perhaps because of his wariness regarding standard superheroics, the only other color Marvel comic Dixon has worked on aside from *Moon Knight* has been Epic's *Alien Legion*. But while writing the explosive exploits of a futuristic Foreign Legion would seem to be a job that would appeal to the scribe's tastes, he was initially hesitant about signing on for that book's second tour of duty.

"I almost didn't want to do it, but I hated to say no to [Epic editor] Archie Goodwin, and I'm glad I didn't," confesses Dixon. "*Alien Legion* has a rabid following. They would be very critical, and rightly so, if I messed up continuity. Also, it wasn't something that belonged to Marvel and a hundred other people had written it. With the Epic contract, [creators] Carl Potts and Frank Cirocco own this property. Did I really want to get involved? By issue #4, they could say, 'You're really screwing this up. Get out of here.' Maybe I was a little scared. It was unfamiliar territory.

"But I was given a completely free hand. Carl, Archie and everybody else up there were very encouraging. In an upcoming issue, it's revealed that Tamara is pregnant, and Carl won't let me tell him who the father is! *That's* how much he trusts me. I could have come up with a completely screwy storyline, but he's letting me run with it. It's his baby, but he has been very good about letting me babysit."

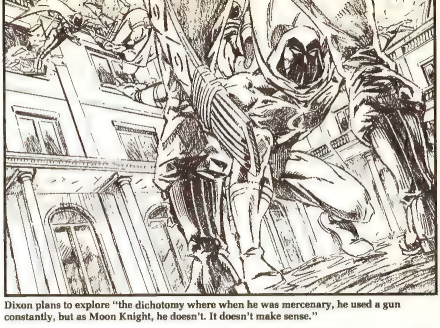
Dixon has even been allowed to challenge the title's foundations.

Airboy usually has the other Airfighters to rely on, but for this final raid on Misery's realm, the only backup he needs is the Heap.

Art: Adams & Andy Kubert

"One of the things that I thought wasn't right with the original series—and I don't even know if the readers were aware of this; this was in the proposal—was that all the Legionnaires had been neurologically conditioned so they wouldn't be xenophobic [i.e. have fear of foreigners] of other members," he explains. "I got a little bit away from that because if you're going to have to share a barracks with a guy who looks like a cockroach, you're going to be a little squeamish. You won't be able to eat the same things, and you may not even be able to live in the same environment. That's some of the stuff [artist] Larry Stroman and I want to get across, that this is *truly* alien. I mean, he has come up with some aliens that it has taken me a while to even understand how they work. Where do you put the word balloon tail?

"I would like to start dealing with the difficulty of space travel. These people are traveling from galaxy to galaxy, and Einsteinian physics tells us that they're not aging as fast as those they leave behind. A government of three galaxies must have the most *incredible* bureaucracy ever created, and more and more, it will be revealed that most of the day-to-day administration is handled by computers. Plus, I want to get more into the fact that some of these races simply can't relate to one another *at all*. They *don't* understand."



Art: Sal Velluto

Dixon plans to explore "the dichotomy where when he was mercenary, he used a gun constantly, but as Moon Knight, he doesn't. It doesn't make sense."

Art: Val Mayerik

Young Master: Trademark: New Comics Group
Contents Copyright 1989 Larry Hama & Val Mayerik.Story Copyright Chuck Dixon

"The editor, Valarie Jones, who's some kind of Japanese scholar, and [artist] Val Mayerik, who's very much into martial arts, keep me on a straight line" on *Young Master*, says Dixon.

There is one race, however, that the members of the Union won't be dealing with for quite some time, but Dixon reveals that personal distaste—*not* a shift in diplomacy—is actually responsible for putting a halt to the Harkilon menace.

"They're a little lame," he admits. "In fact, the Alien Legion graphic novel, which is called *The Tenants of Hell*, had a working title of *No Harkilons* because neither Larry nor I really like them as characters. So, we'll be getting away from them for a while. The Legion is going to be battling interplanetary bandits and some real *weird* villains, people from a billion years ago.

"As much trepidation as I had going into it, it's really fun to write and I wish it was a monthly. Carl is pleased that I hand in the stories months and months before they're due. I get on the *Alien Legion* riff and just write a whole bunch of them. It's really one of the most enjoyable books I'm writing now."

But even the gleam of laser fire can grow less entrancing and close camaraderie can become claustrophobic. During those moments, Dixon can always slip back to a simpler age merely by wielding *The Savage Sword of Conan*.

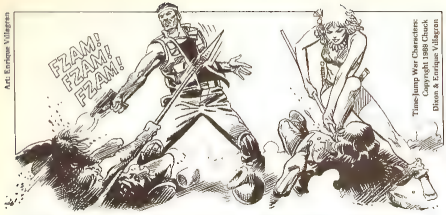
"When they offered me *Conan*, I jumped at it because I could write that for hours. I could write it in my sleep!" says Dixon. "I enjoyed the books when I was a kid. They hit me right at puberty, so they stayed in my mind for the rest of my life. Fortunately, or unfortunately, they've shaped my psyche.

"Conan is a stimulus-and-response kind of guy. He's not stupid, but if given a choice between talking his way out of a situation and fighting his way out, he'll fight his way out, and I think that's one of his appeals. We've all been hassled at the bank and wished we were Conan. 'Why can't I *fight* my way out of debt? Why can't I *make* the dealer give me my car today?' It's a fantasy we've all had."

Oddly enough, fantasy is one thing Dixon feels the barbarian can use a bit less of in his adventures. "The supernatural stuff generally never makes any sense to me, so

Art: Adam & Andy Kubert

"His father was basically distorted by Misery," but in issue #50, Davy gets one last chance to save him from the fiend's hellish dominion.



Art: Enrique Villagran

Time-Jump War Characters: Gary Kwapisz & Mark Dixon & Enrique Villagran

Although the story teams futuristic fighters with captivating cavegirls, Dixon insists *The Time-Jump War* "is basically a space opera."

I have to give it an interior logic in the story. As [artist] Gary Kwapisz says, if you conjure up a demon, you lose an arm or something. All the wizards are obsessed, psychotic people who have some kind of death wish."

And so, rather than rely on those elements which would allow him to churn out "the wizard-of-the-week, monster-of-the-month story," Dixon prefers to concentrate on "how the Hyborian world works."

"You'll *see* Conan putting the saddle on the horse and how he does it. You'll *see* them erecting a siege machine. You'll *see* them doing many of these things and that adds believability to it. In *Prince Valiant*, there's one whole Sunday page where all he did was make a saddle. When I read the reprint books, I thought that was fascinating.

"And if you see a siege machine being built, it's one that was used by the Assyrians or the Scythians; we're *not* making this stuff up, I've culled things from Roman history and ancient British history. Obviously, in *The X-Men*, you don't have the room to show Wolverine sharpening his claws or get in much detail of how they repainted the Danger Room, but in *Savage Sword*, we've got 50 pages, so why not show the readers that?"

However, despite the fun he's having with the character, Dixon recognizes that "Conan has the potential to be the most uninteresting character in comics because everybody knows so much about him. It's like a James Bond movie. You *know* he's going to survive, but it's how you go about it. And the audience is with you. They know somewhat what they're going to see, and as long as you give them that every time, they'll be happy. I mean, my proudest moment in comics is if I could ever convince one reader that Conan might die. I don't think I'll ever do it, but if I could just have one reader worry for two or three pages that the guy might not make it this time. . . ."

Even as he has been attempting to bring greater realism to the Hyborian Age, Dixon has, since its first issue under Eclipse's imprint, been introducing more of the fantastic into the seemingly real world of *Airboy*, a place where a crusade against corporate evil and political intrigue can easily turn into open warfare with giant rampaging rats and armies of the unliving. Although the original character had come to ground for the last time more than 30 years ago, Dixon (aided early on by Tim Truman) found few problems in launching the hero again in the 1980s.

Art: Gary Kwapisz

"Conan is not a cheery character," admits Dixon. Even so, "there are a few more laughs in *Savage Sword* than there used to be."

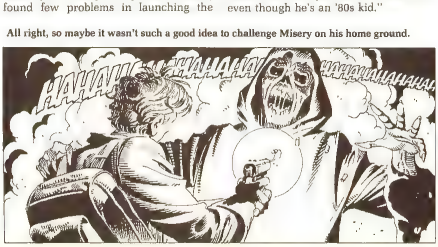
"Everything that made Airboy popular in the '40s and '50s would make him popular today," notes Dixon. "The horror element, the military angle, they seem to be what the readers like, [along with] the globe-trotting adventure and the great costume. This has been a real labor of love because I really like the *Airboy* series and bringing the different Airfighters back. The only one who doesn't talk the way he used to is Skywolf. He wasn't anything more than a Blackhawk knock-off, and while he had some great stories, he had very little personality. So, we made him an argumentative, prideful, stubborn Texan, and the readers responded to that.

"It's funny. I had wanted to get rid of Birdie [Airboy's wing-flapping jet]. I mean, I was a longtime *Airboy* fan, but Birdie just didn't seem to translate into the '80s. But Tim said, 'No! There's *no way* we can get rid of Birdie!' You'll just have to believe that plane works. It's integral to the series. Birdie is a character, not just a means of conveyance, and we get as many letters about Birdie as we do about any of the others."

Still, a few modifications have been made. This Airboy is the son of the original, and along with inheriting his father's plane, comrades and mantle, he has also taken on the multi-national munitions company that the first Airboy created. And while Davy Nelson III is older than his father was when he first took to the skies, Davy is still not yet 20.

"What *Airboy* is all about is the disillusionment of America after the Second World War," explains Dixon. "It's about the condition our country's in today, the distrust, the selling out, and yet our parents had such a great view of the future. Here's Davy coming into this corporation, which is interested only in money, and saying, 'We're getting out of the arms business.' He's a kid, and though he may not be right, at least he's doing what he thinks is morally correct. In that, he's carrying on a legacy his father never could. The running theme of the series has been that Airboy really is a reborn hero, a '40s hero placed in an '80s world, even though he's an '80s kid."

All right, so maybe it wasn't such a good idea to challenge Misery on his home ground.



Art: Adam & Andy Kubert

Savage Sword of Conan Characters Trademark & Copyright 1989 Conan Properties, Inc.

Art: Dan Brereton

It's just the Black Terror against an Earth run by the Mob. "Here's a real good excuse for some violent stories," laughs Dixon.

In other hands, says Dixon, Racer-X "was so cool, it made me sick. We're going to get away from that James Bond, international superspy look."

"The toughest part was deciding how Davy would relate to Valkyrie 'cause that seemed kinky," says Dixon. "For real continuity crazies, Val is the same age as Skywolf."

Art: Todd Ford & Mowry

Art: Brent Anderson & Enrique Villagran

Davy has also had to contend with the reborn misanthropic malevolence of the arch-fiend Misery, a demon his father often battled and the extent of whose evil Airboy is growing more aware of as he reads "The Diary" he has found in recent issues. What he learns in those pages will force the climactic confrontation in issue #50, as drawn by Adam and Andy Kubert with a cover by Joe Kubert.

"It's Davy against Misery, head to head. He goes to Misery's domain because he has had it with Misery, who has been trouble the whole time, and also he discovers that his father is a captive there. He isn't resting in peace. And when Airboy goes there, he runs into many other people held by Misery. We already know about the Flying Dutchman, but many of Airboy's old enemies are there as well as Howard Hughes. Davy takes the Heap along, and he figures in the storyline.

"After that," Dixon says, "is a four-issue continuity in which Davy is in South Africa, where we'll be meeting the White Lion, who real Eclipse fans will remember from the phoney reprints we

Black Terror: Trademark & Copyright 1988 Eclipse Comics

Racer-X: Trademark & Copyright 1988 Color Systems Technology, Inc.
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Art: Larry Stroman

"They're tougher and harder" than they were in the first *Alien Legion*, Dixon notes. "There's more of a 'Legion of the Lost' feel to it, that these guys are expendable."

did in *Strike!* There, he was an effete snob Tarzan knock-off who appeared in World War II adventures. But, the *real* White Lion is actually a racist apartheid supporter; he's Tarzan taken all the way to the right wing. I'm no knee-jerk liberal by any means, so I'm reading up on it to make sure I do a fair appraisal, but it should make for some good issues.

"The *Valkyrie* mini-series and the *Air Maidens* specials are an annual event. They talk to me once in a while about doing Val in her own series, but I would really like to keep her as something special every summer because we can get the best artists for those three issues. The *Air Maidens* thing is just a lark. Obviously, many people like stories about girls with guns. And I like doing those *Skywolf* specials. We're bouncing around many different *Airboy* ideas."

Elsewhere at Eclipse, Dixon is working with co-writer Beau Smith and artist Dan Brereton to prepare another Golden Age gladiator, the Black Terror, for more current conflicts in a three-part Prestige Format mini-series due in late June. However, unlike the refurbished Airboy, this latest hero will be more removed from his predecessor, removed in fact to another Earth entirely.

"It'll be set in an alternate world where Al Capone's son is the Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate. Al Capone became mayor of Chicago and began a political dynasty, much like the Kennedys, which will now lead to the White House. He's the same old Capone. Nothing has changed other than he became more respectable visibly. The entire country has been co-opted by crime organizations, and the Black Terror is one of the few things that stand between the Mob and their wishes about taking over the world," reveals Dixon. "He's *not* just another Punisher clone. He's a patriotic sociopath."

Art: Larry Stroman & Frank Cirocco All Xoan Legion Characters Trademark & Copyright 1988 Carl Potts

When Dixon "used to write Winnie the Pooh books, the tendency was to write a lot of Tigger. That's the problem I have with Jugger Grimrod; he's the easiest to write."

Of late, Dixon has been continuing the travels of the *Young Master* for New Comics Group, exploits begun years ago by Larry Hama and Val Mayerik for Warren. When New wanted adventures beyond the material they were reprinting, Hama suggested Dixon.

"I was *anxious* to take it over because I love samurai movies. Again, I was stepping into a creator-owned situation, but it has worked out pretty well. I'm working with Val Mayerik, who co-owns the character, but he's happy with the scripts and I'm happy with the art."

The series' title, he notes, "pretty much says it all. He's a swordsmaster during the Tokugawa period, which is when all the samurai movies are set. His companion is a blind girl, and both of them are in distant service to an unseen person called the Great Lord, who uses them like pawns on a chessboard. The villain of the piece is the Lord Yagyu, who was the real-life leader of a ninja clan and the main bad guy of Japanese history. He's also the villain in *Lone Wolf and Cub* and a thousand other samurai series. Yagyu pursues them to kill them. The only departure from that is he wants to kill them *slowly*. Basically, they're samurai action stuff, which have very simple storylines. The thing is to come up with tricks in which the samurai shows his prowess."

The powers-that-be at New were impressed enough with Dixon's prowess to want him to spin off another series from *Young Master*'s pages. Although it would mean more work in his favorite genre, the scribe was hesitant to take on another book until he was told Alex Nino would be drawing it. "They hooked me," he

(continued on page 52)

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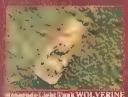

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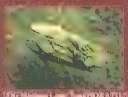

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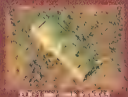

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Secret Origins of BATMAN®

By WILL MURRAY

Bob Kane meets his creation, Batman—as played by Michael Keaton.

It wasn't a bat flying in his window that led Bob Kane to create the detective hero 50 years ago.

Batman is 50. Even to fans who discovered him during comics' Silver Age—never mind those who have followed him from his Golden Age beginnings—it's hard to imagine that every month, ever since spring 1939, there has been at least one Batman comic book published, and usually more.

Bob Kane, the artist whose inkwell and imagination produced Batman, remembers that cold January five decades ago, when, as a struggling 18-year-old cartoonist, his life changed forever.

"I was at DC Comics doing fill-ins for an editor named Vincent Sullivan," Kane recalls. "I was doing slapstick comics, funny drawings like *Mutt and Jeff*, rather than the illustrative type. Superman was born, and the year of 1938 is historic. The character changed the whole complexion of the comic-book industry at that time. Prior to that, there were many junky comic books filled with comics that just weren't going anywhere. The art was pretty bad, but the neophyte cartoonists at least had a place to show their wares, like Vaudeville before Broadway. In January 1939, we were speaking and Vince said, 'Do you think you could come up with another superhero?' I had shown him sketches of Flash Gordon that I copied. I was a very good copycat. Although I preferred the comic slapstick stuff, I was able to do the illustrative type if I wanted to.

"So, I said, 'Of course, Vince,' " Kane goes on. " 'How much are they making a week?' I think they were making $800 apiece and I was making $35 or $40 a week. I said if I can come up with a superhero and make their kind of money, I sure will!"

Sullivan's request was a radical departure from the kind of strips, "Peter Pupp," "Professor Doolittle," "Clip Carson" and others, that Kane had been producing. The artist went back to his Brooklyn apartment and tried to conjure up something that would satisfy Sullivan.

"He *wasn't* looking for another Superman," Kane remembers. "He was looking for another superhero. He said not to copy it, but to emulate it."

At that point, the ink that would become Batman and initiate a chain reaction that 50 years later is a cottage industry that employs countless writers, artists and even actors sat in a seemingly ordinary bottle while Kane turned ideas over in his mind, searching for inspiration.

A movie and comic strip fan, Kane cast his mind back to things he had seen or read that had impressed him as a boy. He remembered *Zorro*, a movie hero played by Douglas Fairbanks Jr., who pretended to be meek by day but fought evil by night in a mask and black cloak. It was a start. Then, his mind recalled a Leonardo DaVinci sketch of a bat-winged glider that had impressed him when he was 13, as well as a movie titled *The Bat Whispers*, which featured a skulking villain dressed in a bat cape. As these unconnected ideas swirled in his imagination, they slowly coalesced into a now-familiar outline.

"I took the figure of Superman and started putting tracings over it," Kane explains. "First, I called him Bird-Man. He had bird wings. And then, I remembered the Bat and the DaVinci sketch. So, I came up with a very crude drawing."

Feeling he had a viable idea, Kane summoned writer Bill Finger, one year his junior and his collaborator on "Clip Carson," and asked Finger's opinion.

"Bill came over on a Sunday and he looked at the sketch," Kane reveals. "It had stiff bat wings attached to the shoulders to look like a bat. Of course, that would inhibit him in his actions during fighting scenes. So, we rearranged it so that it would become more of a cape and swoop out like wings in flight when

All Batman Movie Photos & Batman Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics Inc. Photo: Murray Close

Before Batman's gothic colors became standard, Kane envisioned a red union suit for his caped crusader.

Art: Bob Kane

he was swinging on a rope.

"Bill started to make a few revisions with me on that particular Sunday," Kane adds. "He said, 'Look, you have eyeballs in these slits for the eyes. Why not take the eyeballs out? It will look more mysterious.' "

The pair worked furiously, replacing Kane's original black domino mask with a cowl that featured Gothic church-steeple ears, gradually refining the character's look. Details like Batman's true identity of Bruce Wayne would be worked out in the future. One problem that needed immediate solving was the color of Batman's costume.

"I knew a bat should be dark and I had a black mask on him," Kane notes, "but I think I *might* have had a red union suit instead of the grey one. The initial colors were *not* the colors that finally emerged. They were *much* brighter. Bill told me to subdue them. I got it down pretty much the way you see it on the *Detective Comics* [#27] cover."

When Kane presented the initial Batman sketch to Sullivan the following Monday, the reaction was unqualified.

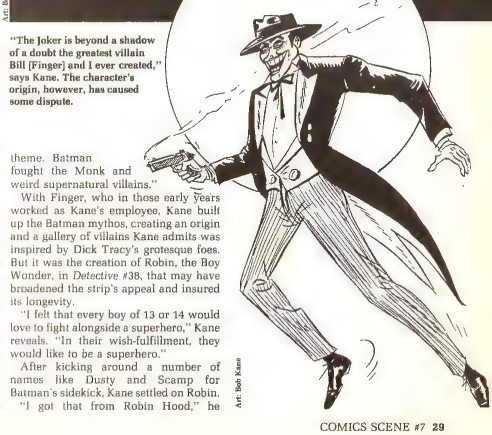
"Vince said, 'This is terrific. I love it!' " Kane recalls. "And he brought it to the publishers, Jack Liebowitz and Harry Donenfeld, and they said, 'Well, it looks OK to us. We're not exactly art experts, but why don't you try it in an issue to see how it goes?' "

Batman premiered in a modest six-page story in *Detective Comics* #27, dated May 1939. The concept was at that time still far from the well-realized Batman that would swiftly emerge. There was no Robin, no Batmobile or Batcave. The villain was unprepossessing when judged against the gallery of rogues like Two-Face, Clayface and Catwoman, who were yet to come. In fact, the idea was so nascent that Batman was called "The Bat-Man," and Kane's stiff batwings were still very much in evidence.

"I did the cover for the first book and there the wings were attached to his arms," Kane explains, "so it pretty much looked like my early sketches with Bill. In the first story, Batman sometimes had stiff wings, and sometimes he wore a cape. In the second and third issues, it started to formulate rather quickly, and mature to where I had Batman pretty much down the way I wanted him. He wore a cape that looked like a bat when he swung out."

Despite these minor infelicities, initial reaction to the strip was unmistakable.

"It caught on almost immediately," Kane says. "I would say it caught on even more so when Robin was created a year later. Robin helped it considerably. But the first year, Batman was a loner and more like a vampire. We did vampirish, Dracula-like stories. We followed the bat theme. Batman fought the Monk and weird supernatural villains."



Art: Bob Kane

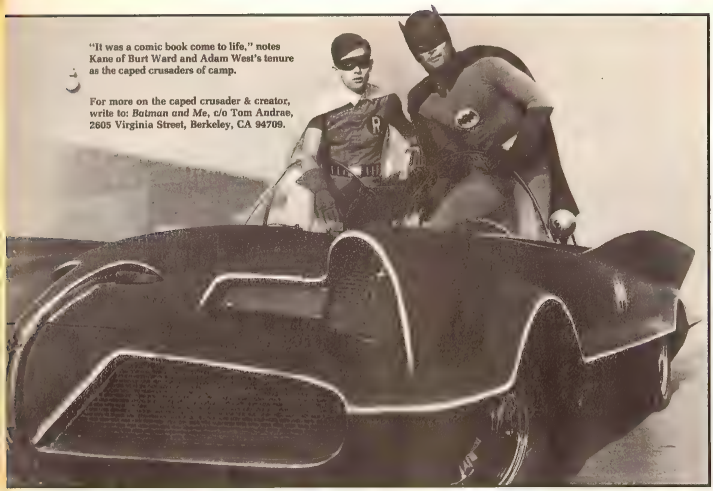
"The Joker is beyond a shadow of a doubt the greatest villain Bill [Finger] and I ever created," says Kane. The character's origin, however, has caused some dispute.

With Finger, who in those early years worked as Kane's employee, Kane built up the Batman mythos, creating an origin and a gallery of villains Kane admits was inspired by Dick Tracy's grotesque foes. But it was the creation of Robin, the Boy Wonder, in *Detective* #38, that may have broadened the strip's appeal and insured its longevity.

"I felt that every boy of 13 or 14 would love to fight alongside a superhero," Kane reveals. "In their wish-fulfillment, they would like to *be* a superhero."

After kicking around a number of names like Dusty and Scamp for Batman's sidekick, Kane settled on Robin.

"I got that from Robin Hood," he



"It was a comic book come to life," notes Kane of Burt Ward and Adam West's tenure as the caped crusaders of camp.

For more on the caped crusader & creator, write to: *Batman and Me*, c/o Tom Andrae, 2605 Virginia Street, Berkeley, CA 94709.

Photo: Copyright 1966 Greenway Productions/20th Century Fox.

reveals. "He wears the tunic and boots of Robin Hood. That was my initial costume. I put a cape on him. That's why I called him Robin, because he was fighting against injustice just as Robin Hood was."

It was a clear case of lightning striking twice. Not only had Kane and Finger created an immortal character in Batman, but in Robin, they had a concept that through most of the '40s, few superheroes could afford to be without.

"There *was* another boy wonder," Kane recalls, "but he wasn't a superhero. And that was Junior in *Dick Tracy*. But I had the first *superhero* boy wonder."

Within a year, Batman had his own comic book as well as his regular slot in *Detective Comics*. Soon, he teamed up with Superman in *World's Finest Comics*. Other writers had to be brought in and Kane himself began hiring assistants, and later ghost artists, to keep up with the voracious demand for Batman stories. Eventually, Finger was hired by DC to work under their direction, and to write other features as well. But through it all, one familiar signature appeared on every Batman story—that of Bob Kane.

"The writer in those days didn't get any credit in all the comic books," Kane explains. "They were anonymous. Today they have the letterer, inker and colorist, and they would put their Aunt Tillie and their Uncle Tim on."

Marv Wolfman will be embellishing on the specifics of Grayson's first appearance.

Art: George Perez

Robin's Secret Origin

Much has been made of returning Batman to his roots. With Jason Todd's demise, Batman has been restored to his role as the lone defender of the night, but as Marv Wolfman reveals in a forthcoming four-part story, that may not have been for the best.

"There are gang wars going on in Gotham City. Somebody is wiping out the leaders of all the gangs and nobody knows who it is, so Batman's on that case. But he's starting to act more like a bludgeoning avenger than a detective, because without Jason, without a Robin, he's acting without restraints," Wolfman explains. "And so, Dick Grayson is brought back by Alfred to help Batman and get him to acknowledge Jason's death."

However, what he discovers upon his return to Wayne Manor will force the former boy wonder to re-examine just who he is and how he came to be during *Batman: Year Three*.

"I make one or two minor changes in his origin," the writer admits, but "nothing that contradicts what was there. I address *how* Bruce adopted him. You can't just come in and say, 'I'm adopting this kid.' Not even in 1940 could you have

Batman, Nightwing, Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.

While Kane has little sympathy for the current corporate approach to creating comics, he still maintains a high regard for Bill Finger, who died in 1974, and whom he credits with assisting on virtually every important Batman innovation—including the character Kane considers the Caped Crusader's most memorable foe, the Joker.

"Bill and I were sitting around and I believe we both came up with the Joker," Kane says. "We were talking about getting a supervillain who would play perennial, but deadly, jokes on the Batman—jokes that were killing and not just comedy pranks. We discussed a Joker character and Bill came to me with a picture of Conrad Veidt from a movie, *The Man Who Laughs*. It's from a story by Victor Hugo about a boy who had his face slashed into a ghastly grin by gypsy surgeons when he was 13. He grew up having funereal eyes, but the mouth had this perpetual ghastly grin. He looked exactly like the Joker I drew. Bill said, 'This is the face of the Joker.' I just gave him more hair. In fact, the Joker I drew in *Batman* #1 wasn't the caricature clown that it became by ghost artists. I had him realistically drawn, like the photo."

Kane's mention of ghost artists and the caricaturized Joker is a reference to one of Kane's first assistants, Jerry Robinson, a frequent illustrator of early Joker stories, who has claimed that the Joker was inspired by a playing card *he* drew. Kane is adamant that Robinson's memory on this score is faulty.

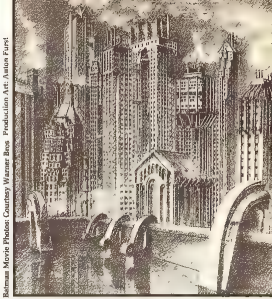
"Jerry came in later on—maybe six or nine months later—with the Joker playing card," Kane insists. "Had Jerry come in earlier with this playing card, then my answer is, why didn't the Joker *look* like the playing card? But the controversy will go on forever. All I can say is that I was there. I'm the source. I have such conviction as to how it all began."

On one point, there is no question:

"The Joker is beyond a shadow of a doubt the greatest villain Bill and I ever created," Kane says. "He's what Professor Moriarty was to Sherlock Holmes."

By the mid-1940s, a swelling battery of artists were working on Batman under Kane's direction, including Robinson, Dick Sprang, George Roussos, Charles Paris and Curt Swan. Of them all, did Kane have a favorite?

"Dick Sprang," Kane answers without hesitation, "because he imitated me the nearest. I think a ghost artist's job is to emulate the artist as closely as possible. Most artists bring their own personality. Jerry Robinson had a very sketchy style. He may have drawn more illustratively than I did, but he wasn't as clean. *Dick Tracy* was what I was trying to do. Jerry brought a whole different dimension to it, as all the other ghost artists did. But Dick Sprang, to this day, still has my cartoony style. He was the best. He still is. I never met Dick. He lived out of town."

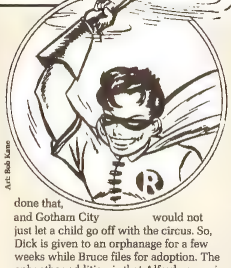


All Batman Movie Photos: Courtesy Warner Bros. Production Art: Anton Furst

Production designer Anton Furst admits that Kane's early view of Gotham City inspired him to create the world director Tim Burton wanted.

But during his early New York days—he has since moved to California—Kane did get to know Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who created Superman.

"I met them at DC Comics in '38," Kane recalls. "They were Cleveland fellows and very nice, very quiet, low-key and very talented. I got Joe some dates at that time. He didn't know any girls in New York and I was always a rogue.



Art: Bob Kane

done that, and Gotham City would not just let a child go off with the circus. So, Dick is given to an orphanage for a few weeks while Bruce files for adoption. The only other addition is that Alfred comes in slightly before Dick.

"My feeling is that Alfred is the one who prevented Dick from becoming as crazed as Batman did. Batman was on his own for years. He didn't have a father figure. He had Leslie Thompkins and some others, but not a real person in charge of his life. He was just allowed to keep this [anger] going and going until he became Batman, this very cold character. Dick, on the other hand, had his parents' deaths settled within a few months, so he didn't have this long brooding time.

Secondly, Dick had Alfred to keep him down. Batman was training the mind and the body, but not the heart. That was where Alfred came in."

But even as the young, currently capeless crusader recalls his life as Robin, the man ultimately responsible for the murders of the Flying Graysons is preparing to again roam Gotham's streets.

"Boss Zucco is being released from prison, but Dick does *not* know this. Alfred knows it," Wolfman reveals. "This story is told in different time periods, so it keeps going over Zucco's entire career. As you watch him grow and you watch Dick change, you watch Batman change and you see the growth and develpment of the Batman-Nightwing team and how Nightwing is no longer under Batman's shadow at all. By the end, he is Batman's equal.

"So, this had to accomplish an awful lot that *Batman: Year One* and *Batman: Year Two* didn't. By having it in the present *and* the past, you could see the beginning of a situation and then see where it went, which you couldn't do in a continuing story. I like very much how Frank Miller did his story in two parts with the Batman story and the Lieutenant Gordon story, so I have mine told through Dick and Alfred's points-of-view," And, notes Marv Wolfman, "*Year Three* is the story not only of the creation of Dick Grayson, but also of the understanding of Batman as to *why* he had a partner and why he can't be what he's slowly becoming without one."

—*Daniel Dickholtz*

Art: George Perez

While Dick Grayson's Nightwing emerges as the Dark Knight's equal, *Batman: Year Three* will prove that the Robin void can't be left unattended.

Dark Knight Art: Frank Miller/Klaus Janson

Frank Miller began the Batman renaissance with his *Dark Knight*, a work Bob Kane admits to not fully understanding.

Photo: Courtesy Dan Scappaticci

Photo: Courtesy Dan Scappaticci

"When I first saw them, I was quite thrilled. I thought from then on, Batman would catch on," recalls Kane of his early impressions of the Columbia serials: (Top) 1943's *Batman* (Lewis Wilson) and Robin (Douglas Croft), and (bottom) 1949's *The New Adventures of Batman and Robin* (Robert Lowery & John Duncan).

So, I got him some dates, and the girls used to kid and say, 'Who do you think we're going out with tonight? Batman and Superman!' "

Despite Batman's enormous success, Bob Kane makes a surprising admission when he ponders what he would do differently if he could live his life over.

"I would have preferred to be a slapstick cartoonist," he muses, "like on *Mutt and Jeff* or *Popeye*. Actually, I was a better cartoony artist than I was an illustrator. You know, people have knocked my work, saying it's stiff, I can't semi-draw as well as some of the illustrators who took over Batman, like Carmine Infantino and Neal Adams. However, I was an innovator. I didn't *want* my style to look too illustrative. I wanted it to look more like *Dick Tracy*. That's why the Penguin is cartoony and the Joker is a little cartoony. I did a combination of the two. I had Batman as illustrative as I wanted him to be. I simplified all the muscles. I didn't overbuild them. I could draw technically better if I wanted to, but I wanted it simplified. So, my style evolved, and within a year, I had it down pretty much in my mature period. It was about as illustrative as I wanted it to be. I didn't think the illustrators or the ghost artists ever improved upon my work, I really don't. Just because they drew it better didn't mean it *was* better."

Kane retired from working on Batman in 1966, when the much-heralded Carmine Infantino "New Look" Batman premiered under the editorship of Julius Schwartz. The Dark-night Detective has gone through several revampings since then, including the recent bestselling *Dark Knight* series by Frank Miller. Kane admits that he seldom looks in on his creation today.

"I don't follow *Detective Comics* and *Batman* as much because out here in California, there are no corner candy stores where you could browse and buy comic books," he says with a dry chuckle. "But I followed it again with the resurgence of the *Dark Knight*."

Kane isn't quite sure what to make of Frank Miller's version.

"I thought it was quite an innovation," he admits. "It had some political overtones I'm not sure I read into correctly. It was a little bit too right-wing. I'm not sure I understood the story that well because it's a great departure from the traditional stories in *Batman*. I think Frank Miller's a classic writer, a classic artist, but I'm not sure I know what he's talking about all the time."

Kane also admits that he barely recognized his own creation.

"The face and the drawing were so different," he points out. "At 50, Batman looked much older. It wasn't the Bruce Wayne I remember, like my image of a young Robert Wagner. I found myself looking at something that I didn't know. It looked completely alien. I thought it was very avant garde. But how do you

{continued on page 41}

Even Batman couldn't stop the urban blight that production designer Anton Furst has set into motion for the movies.

By ADAM PIRANI

Without the right production designer, director Tim Burton knew there wouldn't be much of a Gotham City for his Batman to prowl. So, he turned to one of the film world's fastest-rising stars: Anton Furst.

As well as designing the supernatural comedy *High Spirits* (STARLOG #137) and the fantasy tale *Company of Wolves* for director Neil Jordan, Furst also spent two years working with Stanley Kubrick on *Full Metal Jacket*, creating the battleground of Hue, Vietnam out of London's disused docklands.

Sitting in his studio-style office at England's Pinewood Studios, while the crew films Michael Keaton on his Batcave set, Furst is surrounded by the products (and inspirations) of his imagination: sketches of sets, designs, a bookshelf filled with art books, models, photographs and in the center of it all, his angled drawing board.

Furst's initial conversations with Burton helped determine the look for this cinematic interpretation of the Caped Crusader. "Batman has been going for 50 years, so the first thing was *which* [version]," the designer says, "because it has gone through so many different styles. Where are we going to pick it up from, and are we going to seriously look at *any* one of those particular styles?

"We were very interested in the Bob Kane one, the original. We decided to totally throw aside the TV program as a spoof on the whole thing, so we knew we were going for the *original* Batman,

Photo: Murray Close

Combining various architectural techniques, Anton Furst formulated a blueprint for a *brutal* metropolis.

Coming Soon To This Site: Gotham City

which has a strong, heavy, solid look. We were going back to the original DC comic and the look of Batman as Bob Kane originally did it. So, that's a period piece, if you like, by definition.

"But there was another one, *The Killing Joke* [illustrated by Brian Bolland], which had a very strong graphic look to it, and was based on the Joker. This *Batman* script that we're doing has the Joker as a major character. So, it was those two that really influenced us.

"Then, we realized that he's a knight of the dark, so we knew that much of the film was going to be done in the nighttime. That suggested a very broad stroke to it, so we didn't go into nitty gritty detail.

"We thought, what style are we going for in terms of [period], and we decided to see what happens if we go for absolutely *no* period at all, not actually stating that it's any particular period, and see whether that will actually formulate its own style."

Explains Furst, "Gotham City is definitely based in many ways on the *worst* aspects of New York. There's no doubt about it: the whole scenario is like the Mafia, gangsterism, the fact that it's a very ugly city in many ways, and that it's bankrupt most of the time. If you take the worst aspects of New York, and then augment that . . .

"In New York, you get the zoning," notes the production designer. "They try to actually step the buildings back to get light into the streets. Well, imagine going back 200 years and there has been *no* planning commission. We ended up with this rather interesting idea of canyons, with cantilevered forward structures, and bridges over. That way, there is just a little light, and we're compressing and condensing the city even more and stretching it higher.

"We even took things like prison architecture and stretched it into skyscrapers, and then [we brought in] the buildings of Louis Sullivan [a Chicago-based innovator in skyscraper construction who lived from 1856-1924] and zigzurat structures going back and then cantilevering out, and fascism, and putting it all together into huge massive vent structures, so you're *always* expressing the underground. And just *brutality*, absolute brutality . . .

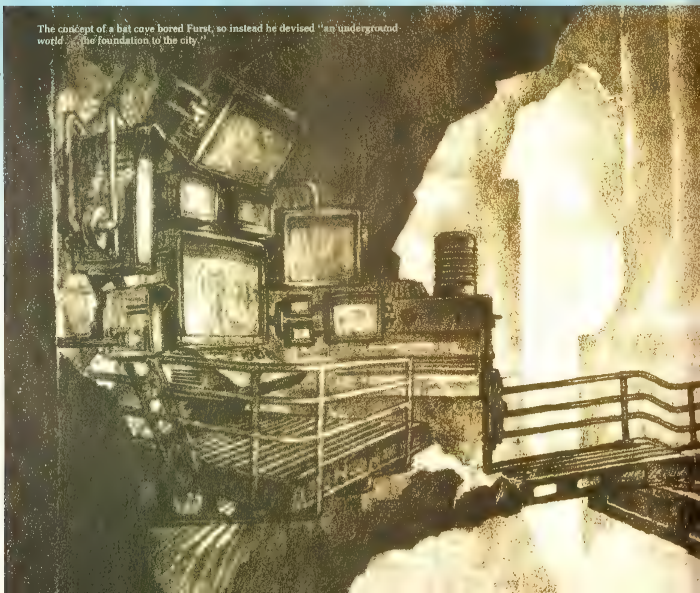
"Then," adds Furst, "we put in modern architecture, just to confuse the issue, and it doesn't look like a complete period piece. But if we put in modern architecture, we would also go for the brutalism, like Russian constructivist sort of buildings, along with this fascinating Japanese architect Shin Takamatsu who does, like, locomotive design and nut and bolts architecture.

"So, we've got an *incredible* anomaly of different styles. We have Anton Gaudi [1852-1926, leading Spanish Art Nouveau architect who designed remarkable churches] stretched into a skyscraper, and we've got Otto Wagner [1841-1918, a leading Viennese architect] locked onto brownstone buildings with fascist fronts on it, and [Isambard Kingdom] Brunel-type Victorian bridges.

"In the end, you start developing your own style. It's just that this sheer potpourri, this almost Dadaesque juxtaposition of styles, ends up with its own style *hopefully*.

"We really wanted to express the evil quality of Gotham City. The first line of the script that Tim was involved with was 'Hell has erupted through the pavements and just carried on growing.' "

All Production Design Art: Anton Furst

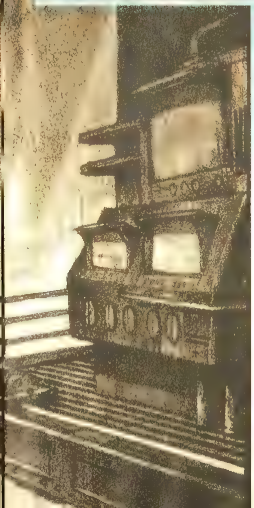


The concept of a bat cave bored Furst, so instead he devised "an underground world . . . the foundation to the city."

All Batman Movie Photos & Batmobile Illustrations Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics Inc

In the finished product, the mysterious Bruce Wayne (Michael Keaton) monitors the actions of Alexander Knox and Vicki Vale.

Photo: Murray Close



This vision of Gotham City also reflects the personalities of the story's two central characters. "Batman is, in fact, a tragic case," Furst says, "This is traditional in the storyline: he inherits a fortune and the Wayne Foundation, because his parents were shot in front of him by hoodlums. Because the whole town is based on crime and corruption, we wanted to express that in the city's look, so what we did was *starve* the whole city of color; Gotham City is just rust and brownstone and brick.

"But the Joker, who emerges as a result of an appalling accident, goes into this clown's costume, white face and red lips. His makeup goes on into his clothes, and so he just freaks out with color. We thought it was interesting to have this very starved-of-color look, and then have the Joker and all his Goons, his clothes, his cars, *everything* associated with him just *leap* out of the background.

"Batman is the opposite. He's black, wears a black outfit, and drives a black Batmobile. Everything to do with him is black, with that forbidding black knight look, so there are two opposite situations to be played there.

"And I know that Tim's interest is, you've got a psychology of somebody who has been *severely* disrupted by the most appalling thing of watching your parents being shot in front of you when you were a kid, inheriting this fortune—it's real nervous breakdown material, that could produce a psychotic sort of mind, and you've got the Joker who is a psychotic. In the end, you've really got two psychotics battling it out, the difference being one's good, the other's bad."

In terms of referring to the Batman comics, Furst has taken on only what he calls "that graphic broad stroke. You're looking at very *strong, huge* shapes. When you have framing shots, you've got these massive structural shapes *within* the frame.

"For instance, the Batcave produces an interesting problem to me," Furst admits, "because I think caves are unbelievably amorphous and boring. How do you frame them? They all look the *same*. When you've got something as organically irregular as that, there's nothing ever to lock onto.

"So, we decided not to make it just a cave in the ground, we decided to make it an underground *world*, rather like what's in *Phantom of the Opera*, so instead of a cave, it has become the foundation to the city. You've got these great buttresses coming down through the frame and then, to make a concession to that, we've put the rock structures within it."

But the filmmakers have hardly felt constrained to incorporate the specific designs of the Batmobile or the Batcave from the comics. "We've never really

observed the comic," Furst notes, "we've wanted to have a totally fresh approach; to get the *feel* that we've liked most from the original DC comics and then just not look at the details.

"There were certain images that immediately just banged out that we knew we wanted to get into it, and then it didn't go any further. For the Batmobile, the Batwing and all that, we *knew* we had to come up with something *else* that people hadn't seen, but within character, just maintain the character, that's all. It's much better just to free your mind. It's a different medium, and it has to do different things. In fact, the story *requires* certain things that *aren't* in any comic.

"With the car, we came up with just a brute force machine that didn't actually subscribe to any time period. What we did *not* want to do—because we knew that the Batmobile was something that people want to see and they don't want to see a bad one—was a concept car like you see at a motor show or something like that. We wanted it to become some *extraordinary* machine that you had *never* seen before."

To accomplish that, Furst and his team "took elements of all the heaviest images that we could think of, like the Blackbird aircraft, and, we went back to the salt flat

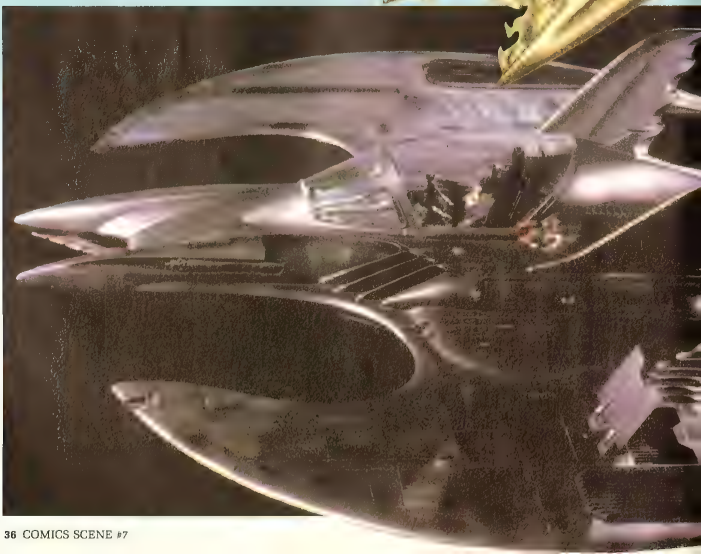
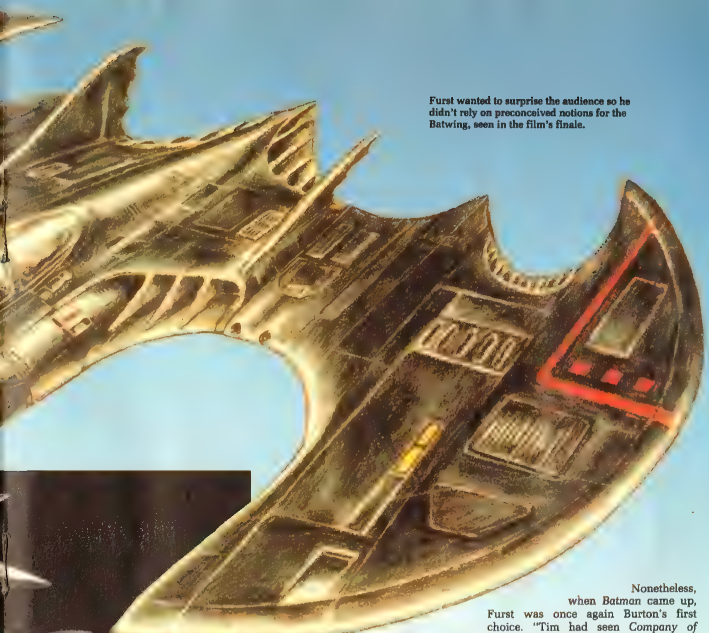


Photo: Doug Lubin



Furst wanted to surprise the audience so he didn't rely on preconceived notions for the Batwing, seen in the film's finale.

speed machines of the '40s, when they were doing all the speed trials, and then took elements of all the vehicles that had that brutality built into them, like the Stingray car, and put them together. Also, we wanted to have that sense that it really goes *fast*, as though it was just an engine.

"And we came up with this," he says, pointing to a two-foot long, black model. "We wanted it to look very forbidding, and the most forbidding things that we had ever seen were some of those surveillance aircraft, so it has that stealth look to it. It's like a knight in armor, with that shrouded, helmeted feel to it, and then with a rocket engine right down it—so you end up with this piece of pure expressionism."

Furst originally met Tim Burton (CS #2, 3) when the director approached him for a previous project. "Funnily enough, Tim wanted me to do *Beetlejuice*," the production designer says, "and I couldn't do it, because I was still stuck with Stanley Kubrick."

Nonetheless, when *Batman* came up, Furst was once again Burton's first choice. "Tim had seen *Company of Wolves* and that subscribed very much to his philosophy of film design," Furst says, "of that believable unreality we work in, so that you formulate your reality, in terms of the scenario, and of the set pieces.

"Then, when I came out with the original design concepts for the film, he *immediately* locked straight into it and agreed, so it has been *excellent*. I find it very stimulating to discuss design with Tim because it's like part of the team.

"Because *Batman* is a very big film, Tim hasn't got the time to come and design it, so he's relying on me to design it. But in terms of his input, it has always been that when I've come up with five or six ideas, he has always gone immediately for the one that I like most. So, there's a fairly symbiotic relationship there."

Furst also found another approving eye when *Batman*'s creator, Bob Kane (see page 28), visited the set. "He came in when we had got most of it up, and seemed terribly enthusiastic," the designer notes. "He just said, 'Fantastic! I really love what's going on. It looks great.' "

A production designer on a movie is not just someone who comes up with visually exciting concepts. "My job, basically," Furst says, "is to work out, from the script, what we require the camera to look at, apart from the actors. It is, to a certain extent, illustration, but you're obviously going into a totally different kind of reality with film work. The whole art, method, form of making something which is illustrational for film is a completely different technique. You're obviously talking on a much bigger scale for a start, and you're talking in a much more three-dimensional sense. So, you've got to know enough about filmmaking to know what not to build and what not to do.

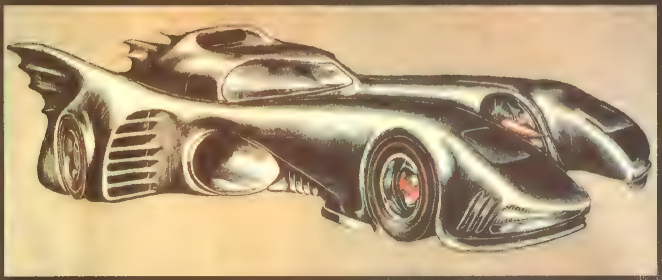
"I don't think you qualify as a production designer unless you know all about architectural styles, because all your detailing is going to come unstuck. And obviously you're dealing with structure, and you're dealing with an implicit knowledge of engineering, with all those principles of cantilever and nuts and bolts and glue. Should you do it in steel or wood or plastic or cast it? If you're going to do many off of it, you're going to cast it and repeat them, and all of those same things apply there.

"But I think also what we have to know about as designers is all art, not just architecture. We've got to put into our sets the other layer, like what's going to dress them and what's going to be in them and the fact that in the end it's turning up on the screen as a *two-dimensional* thing."

For the Batmobile, Furst didn't look to the comic-book interpretations, but again went for "a brute force machine that didn't actually subscribe to any time period."

This new car has its share of surprise accessories, including remote control and the finest in anti-theft devices.

(Photo: Murray Close)



Additionally, Furst notes, "If you're doing this sort of movie, if you don't know all about effects, then you're going to totally screw up. You must know enough about it so that you're not building what you could do in other ways. Otherwise, you're just spending a *fortune*.

"With your knowledge of how to put films together and whether that should be a model or traveling matte or whether it should be built, you have to break it all down, and that you do with the storyboard artist. You break it down shot by shot—camera angles and everything else—until you actually develop what you know you're going to have to build, so you don't build any higher. Then, you've got to orchestrate it with the script and discuss it with the director, so that you work out what they want and what you can give them. It's a lot of backwards and forwards."

Hell indeed does erupt to the surface of this grim view of the city.

All Batman Movie Photos: Courtesy Warner Bros Inc.

Photo: Murray Close

Photo: Murray Close

The master builders of the world of *Batman* (left to right): Construction manager Terry Apsey, construction assistant John New, set decorator Peter Young, production designer Anton Furst and supervising art director Les Tomkins in Gotham Square.

Furst, now 44, hasn't come the traditional route into the movie business of working his way up through the ranks. "I trained at the Royal College of Art, which has a film and television school," he notes. "I studied environmental design, which is the only theater design course, and then did a sabbatical year at the film and television school. And I was very lucky: Tony Masters, who designed *2001*, was looking for assistants at that time, and the production wrote to the Royal College asking if there were people who could visualize well. I was one of the people put forward, and I got the job, so I got a [union] ticket, which was very lucky. It was a film called *Kyle*, which didn't actually happen in the end, it folded.

"Then, I went into special FX more, because I was always developing the special FX aspects with Tony, as his assistant. I had a company called Holoco, and we did a holography show at the Royal Academy [in London] called 'Light Fantastic,' which was a success that none of us expected. As a result of which, The Who, who backed the show, bought a quarter of Shepperton Studios and set up a company with the money.

"Just at that time, there was this plethora of FX films, and we had all this laser equipment, so we were doing laser effects, and we then brought in model units, and we worked for four years."

Furst's work was as an FX supervisor rather than a designer. "At one point, we were working on *Outland*, *Flash Gordon*, *ALIEN* and *Moonraker* all at the *same* time. We had crews all over. I was running a whole operation. I wasn't near a drawing board; I was just trying to keep the crews working."

Then, in 1984, came *Company of Wolves*, which in turn was followed by *Full Metal Jacket*. Now he's doing *Batman*. Admits Anton Furst, "It has been very quick."

Kane

(continued from page 32)

knock success? It sold out, so apparently we had to graduate from the early days where the naive Batman stories were selling to today. They probably wouldn't sell if we kept up that same genre."

Last year's "Death in the Family" sequence in *Batman*, which resulted in Robin's death, also caught Kane's attention. Even though it was the jason Todd Robin who died, not Kane's original Dick Grayson version, Kane wasn't happy.

"I would *never* have killed him off," Kane states unequivocally. "He's a key character. It's like killing off Dr. Watson, or Jane with Tarzan, or Tonto with the Lone Ranger."

It has been more than 30 years since Bob Kane has drawn Batman regularly. He has a sharp answer to those who ask him if he misses it.

"I *am* drawing Batman," he retorts. "I have shows all over the country with my Batman oils. And I do lithographs. I've been in fine galleries. I hang in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I haven't quit Batman. I've quit comic-book drawing. But I'm now into Batman deeper than ever. In fact, this year I have six shows lined up for New York, California and maybe England. I'm as busy as ever."

But does the urge to return to drawing comics ever stir?

"I tell you at this stage in my life," Kane says frankly. "I don't have the patience. I don't have the staying power I had as a kid. I drew it for 25 years, from 1939 to 1966. Although I had some help on it here and there, I still had my hand in it until 1966. So, that was 25 years—long enough. Your neck gets tired, and your hands. I would like to do one guest appearance story at this stage, yeah. *One* Batman story for DC."

Looking back over a career that has included serving as technical consultant for several Batman film projects, as well as creating TV productions, including animated shows like *Courageous Cat and Minute Mouse* (a takeoff on Batman and Robin) and *Cool McCool*, a TV movie called *The Silent Gun* and the original premise that later became the TV series, *Longstreet*, Bob Kane is, in the final analysis, content. And who can blame him with Batman's 50th anniversary, a major motion picture (which he discussed last issue), a TV documentary on his career and life, and his autobiography, *Batman and Me*, all scheduled for 1989?

"All and all, it has been a very lucrative and successful career," he says, "and I have no regrets about it. I only wish Siegel and Shuster fared as well. They were terrific. If not for them, I wouldn't have created Batman nor would there be a comic book industry. Our two creations initiated more than 1,000 superheroes, at least. They're all one offshoot or another of Superman or Batman."

Freleng

(continued from page 20)

get, but most of the reaction was the same. I found I could run one for the group at the studio, and when I ran it in the theater, they would laugh at *almost* the same places. I could sit out in the lobby and tell where it was getting a laugh."

Also contributing to the Warners cartoons' success was the way everyone stayed in character. "People like someone who's a winner all the time. That's what they like to see in Bugs. He never loses. You can't make him lose, you *can't*; it would just destroy the character." He likens Bugs to James Cagney, "more of a rogue," and throws the Panther into the category as well. "The Pink Panther is more of a Boy Scout character, like Mickey Mouse, but you don't dare make a loser out of him." Sylvester, on the other hand, is a loser. "Daffy Duck is a loser. Yosemite Sam is a loser. They're all losers."

Animation has changed "drastically," says Freleng, and he doesn't say it like it's a good thing. "It can't be Disney and Warner Bros. for the rest of our lives and for generations to come. When they stop imitating each other, maybe they'll do something different. But what they call different is limited animation, which has *no* personality, just moving around, that's all they do."

Because Warners sold off its library of pre-1948 cartoons, Freleng doesn't have copies of all his work. (Some of those early shorts are available, however, on MGM/UA Home Video; later cartoons are collected on Warner Home Video.) He is offered a bootleg copy of his controversial "Clean Pastures," which, due to its possibly racist caricatures, will probably never see the light of video. Freleng says he hasn't set eyes on that one since it was made in 1937, and thinks he would be "ashamed" to see it today.

What he really wants is a copy of his favorite cartoon, "Rhapsody Rabbit" (1946), in which Bugs strives to play Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* despite the intervention of a piano-bound mouse. "It's not necessarily the best, but it's my favorite," he says wistfully.

Later, at the T.N.T. Circle Gallery reception, Freleng is given a hero's welcome. He poses for pictures with animation fans and another huge stuffed Pink Panther. There are 125 framed Freleng cels for sale, in the $500-$700 range, with scenes from old Looney Tunes and Pink Panther cartoons (six volumes of which are available on MGM/UA Home Video). A little girl, age 3½, is clutching a stuffed Bugs Bunny and pulling away from Freleng, frightened of the photographers' flashes. But Friz Freleng bends down to her and she has a change of heart; soon, the old animator has wrapped his frail arms around the little girl and her Bugs, embracing the next generation.

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COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue South, 8th Floor,
New York, NY 10016

...I've been following your readers' opinions about the casting of Michael Keaton as Batman in the upcoming movie. I don't want to join the debate, but I've been busy drawing Batman's uniform over pictures of Keaton. The results aren't bad. Ideally, nobody should ever get a good look at Batman anyway. It's almost as if the casting of Bruce Wayne is more important than that of Batman.

Patrick Lozito
Address Withheld

...I really enjoyed the Alan Moore article in CSQ #4 because it gave good insight to Moore and his projects. Does anyone remember Dave Sim's comment from CSQ #1? Well, Sim, Jefferson's dream of liberty came true. I am anxiously awaiting *Mandelbrot Set* and *AARGH!*

Good article on the *Spider-Man* movie. I agree with Stan Lee, it won't be as good as it could be. For one thing, Peter Parker, before he was Spider-Man, was a bit of a geek, and surely, when put in the present, was not a big rock (or any other type of music) fan. He spent his time in science books and with his best friend, the microscope. And now, being Spider-Man and working at the *Daily Bugle* doesn't give Petey much time to hear, or care about, music. Also, we've seen *enough* movies about teenagers coping with life. This movie should start with Peter already with the power, with flashbacks of how he got them. Now, I just got a flash--the movie begins with a 76-year-old Peter Parker coming out of the closet. The whole movie would be a flashback being told to a reporter, much like *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*.

John Britt
7350 SW 154 Terrace
Miami, FL 33157

...I missed COMICS SCENE #5, with its invitation to cast the *Judge Dredd* movie. Looking over the suggestions made by readers in #6, however, I was *amazed* that one man didn't emerge as the clear favorite, but that he wasn't even mentioned! Clint Eastwood is the only man alive who could do justice to Dredd. Not only were the early Dredd designs based on him, but he has *exactly* the voice and personality Dredd should have: Can't you just hear Eastwood snarl, "There's no escape from the law, creep!"?

While I realize that Eastwood is a little older than what most fans expect Dredd's age to be, I think this is a minor problem at most. As far as I know, Dredd's age isn't given in the comics—who's to say he couldn't be older?

What do you want to bet, though, that someone decides to follow the tragic example of the *Batman* movie and casts Don Knotts in the role?

Steven J. Getman
7 Manor Avenue
Apt. #0115
Hempstead, NY 11550

..For crying out loud, do something about your covers! They've been less than attractive lately, and the last one (issue #5) was downright ugly. I felt like I was buying *Teen Beat*.

More animation coverage. This is, I'll admit, the primary reason why I buy the magazine. How about a post-mortem on *Beany & Cecil*? Or something about Don Bluth? Maybe an article (long overdue) on Ralph Bakshi's *Mighty Mouse*. Or something on Bakshi's new *Tattertown* series.

More alternate press coverage. I don't mean Eclipse and First.

More comic strip coverage. It seems things like *Wizard of Id* or *The Far Side* only get mentioned in your magazine if someone buys the movie rights to them. No good -the strips are interesting in themselves. (And by the way, if you could manage an interview with Bill Watterson, that would be cool beyond words.)

Well, those are the only suggestions for improvement I could come up with. Keep up the (mostly) good work.

Eddie Hegstrom
911 Dewey
Perry, IA 50220

Photo: Courtesy Randall Lucas

WANTED: THE DARK MITES! Atlanta, Georgia sleeps safely at night when these two crimefighters are on the crawl. Meet the Dark Knight (Nathan Ranson, age 3) and his sidekick the Tot Wonder (Kenton Ranson, age 2).

...As a devoted Marvel fan (or as some would say "Marvel Zombie") and a developing DC fan, I must agree with most of what the letters say in issue #5. At both Marvel and DC, the characters we see in four color do not often translate into what we see on the wide or small screen, the most disappointing (which is a mild term) being Thor. What I can't believe is how editors can fight over how Spider-Man comes out on screen and let this atrocity go unimpeded. The only two things I can see are either who actually owns the rights to the characters or the more likely reason, which I hate to admit, the big dollar sign. I also don't know whether to feel sorry or happy for the people who don't read comics because they don't get to find out what the characters are truly like, but they don't have the same disappointment as comics readers do when they see the gross injustice being done. I myself will stick to comics until people (whomever it may be) can look past a dollar sign and make a movie with a character like we, the comic readers, know it can be made.

One last short note. I wish Richard Williams the best of luck on his movie *The Thief and the Cobbler*, and if he ever gets it finished, I will be one of the first to line up at a theater near me to see it.

Richard Yates
16208 W. 132nd Street
Olathe, KS 66062

...I anxiously awaited COMICS SCENE #5 at the local Waldenbooks and it finally arrived. I was awestruck by all of the information jam-packed into this issue! As I looked through, I especially enjoyed the sections on *Batman*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Superman* and the *She-Hulk*. Finally, a comic magazine worthy of my hard-earned $3.50. Don't change a thing, and keep up the great work, guys!

Alan R. Reeves
700 N. 150 Street, R.R.1
Basehor, KS 66007

...You never know what you'll receive after your name and full address appears in a national magazine.

Of course, there's the usual stuff: letters from fellow fans and order forms from comics sellers, but I received something the other day that I just must tell you about.

Some guy down in Virginia claims that he has made a fortune and he's going to tell me how I can do it, too. All I have to do is send one dollar to each of the persons whose name and address appears at the bottom of this man's letter. I also include my name and address on this list and advise these people to send one dollar to each of the folks on the list.

This man claims that what he's doing is "perfectly legal." Yeah, sure.

I don't know what makes this man think I'm gullible enough to fall for such a scam. I only hope no

other COMICS SCENE readers fall for this nonsense.

Turning to other matters: This past summer I saw the most amazing movie of the year, perhaps even the whole decade. I'm referring, of course, to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. I will admit that I didn't laugh all that much, but visually, the movie is incredible.

There were times during *Roger* when I almost believed the animated characters were real. And when Bob Hoskins visits Toontown, well, that's just something I'll never forget.

I would like to close by informing you that the intermingling of cartoon characters from different studios as depicted in *Roger* isn't so unprecedented. Back in the early '70s, Warners permitted its cartoon characters to appear in *Daffy Duck and Porky Pig Meet the Groovie Ghoulies*. While Mel Blanc handled the vocal chores for the Warner characters, Filmation handled the cartooning, resulting in their usual limited animation.

Michael Skully
Altoona, PA

. . . In CS #5, there were several articles, the subjects of which I would like to applaud. These were the ones dealing with the resurgence of the American cartoon. Over the past few years, TV cartoons have been a mindless wasteland, with only a few oases dotting the landscape. Most of the time you couldn't even sit down to watch a cartoon without having some toy pushed down your throat. Between He-Man and his little friends and Jem, that "truly outrageous" rocker, you could hardly find anything worth watching. Your best bet would have been to turn on the same reruns of Looney Tunes that you had seen 50 times, sit back, and enjoy. This made no sense to me. For years, I waited for the cartoon industry to get off their collective rear and start doing quality work once again.

Today, there seems to be hope. A bright new set of cartoons are set to hit the TV screen. One, the *Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtles*, has already had a brief trial run. While I was only able to see two of the episodes that were aired, these were enough to convince me that this was no run-of-the-mill cartoon. The show's scripting, plot and pure artistic excellence led me to rejoice. Finally, someone had made a decent cartoon.

Another new cartoon which I have high hopes for is *Superman*. I realize that it will be on the network TV Saturday line-up, which is not famous, as of late, for producing cartoons of merit. There are many things, including the dreaded censor, going against the Saturday morning cartoons. But if Marv Wolfman can do as he promises in Bill Warren's article and play *Superman* as straight as possible, then something of merit might be produced. I would hate to see all the talent involved in the production be wasted by having the cartoon join the multitude of pandering drivel that is so common in today's cartoon world.

The third, and final cartoon I would like to note is *Beany & Cecil*. Although I know little of the cartoon, if it's as good as Bob Miller's article makes it out to be, then I will be watching it with pleasure.

All in all, I would say that if the cartoons of the future reflect the talent and style of those three, then there is hope—hope that the American cartoon will once again attain the heights it once enjoyed. Then, I will rest assured that the children of tomorrow will have something of quality to view while eating Saturday breakfast.

Steven C. Rose
Indianapolis, IN

While Beany and Cecil *have been lost at sea, hopefully those kids of tomorrow can still enjoy their Cocoa Puffs with* Mighty Mouse *and* A Pup Named Scooby Doo.

. . . Thank you for confirming my worst fears about the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Over the past few years, I have watched the mutated turtles evolve from a tough, gritty, yet ironic parody of Frank Miller's *Ronin* to cute, furry "heroes in a half shell."

I first followed the series in the early '80s, with the less-than-bestseller debut issue. What I immediately identified with was the location of Mirage Studios, not far from my home in Connecticut. I found the book exciting, entertaining, and artistically spectacular. As the book increased in sales, so did the responsibilities of the artists. Other writers and illustrators were called in to help the book while Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird were busy. I remained faithful, collecting the first 14 issues. What I noticed was a slight decline in quality. No offense to Michael Dooney, but the Turtles will always remain "Eastman and Laird's."

I remember reading in the *Hartford Advocate*, "Who is to say an animated Saturday morning TV series is not out of the realm of possibility?" (May 8, 1985). Ha, ha. I laughed it off then, but a few months ago, I was hit with a rude awakening. My 11-year-old neighbor came yelling at my door: "Craig, Craig! They're on! Your turtles!" I almost didn't believe him. Fear welled in my stomach. I knew it—they had sold out.

What I watched for the next half hour was a travesty of American comic books. These were not the turtles I had so miserly collected for the past four years. These were Smurfs with lethal weapons. What? Splinter was a human? When? Why is Michaelangelo's headband yellow? Am I dreaming?

Sadly, I was not. Later that month, I saw something in the window of a toystore that almost made me cry. It was a furry little stuffed frog with a mask and suction cups on its feet. This is what set the comics world on fire in 1985? This is what kept readers so enthralled for more than three years? This is what spawned countless rip-offs? A doll somewhat resembling a John Candy werewolf?

What I am merely trying to say is that Eastman and Laird should steer away from Hollywood glitz and, as Eastman remarked in that *Advocate* article, "keep the faith."

Craig Ingerto
South Windsor, CT

. . . Issue #4 was still up to par, as far as this reader is concerned, with each issue since the magazine's recent re-introduction. The balance of accurate and entertaining writing, and demonstrative and well executed artwork is something that should be, and is, intrinsic in a successful comic book or comics zine. And COMICS SCENE is a glowing example of this.

OK, I know you're waiting for the other shoe to drop, so here goes. Since comics themselves are a form of literature that relies on visual input for reader understanding and enjoyment, I would like just a little more info (with four-color embellishment) centering around the major names in comics art and related fields—namely, people with unlimited talent who just aren't written up or featured very often, usually only because they're not part of this or that month's mundane multiple-crossover melodrama, or whatever faddish undertaking happens to be "hot" this season.

For instance, people like: Richard Corben, Frank Frazetta, Dave Stevens, Burne Hogarth, David Mazzucchelli, Berni Wrightson, Barry Smith, Jim Steranko, Paul Gulacy, Steve Ditko, Jack Kirby, Tim Truman, William Stout, Hajime Sorayama, Gahan Wilson, Syd Mead, Will Eisner, Harvey Kurtzman & Will Elder, Boris Vallejo, Jim Fitzpatrick, Rick Griffin, Marshall Rogers, Hans Reudi Giger, Arthur Suydam and James Bama.

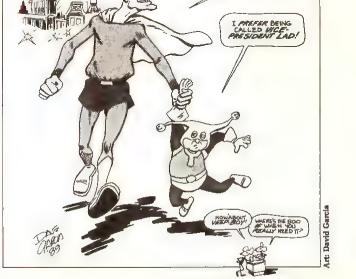
What are these people doing? Have they retired from the field or are there new projects in the works? How and when did their careers begin? What are their views on the comics industry? ●

I really believe COMICS SCENE is a great benefit to all those interested in comics, both professional and enthusiast. I also believe that a little broadening of format (as far as those featured and art reproduction) would go a long way towards making the magazine an even more effective chronicle of every facet of the graphic narrative style of storytelling.

For the time being, however, I think COMICS SCENE is, without a doubt, the finest journal of the genre available, so keep going boldly forward. We readers will be here!

Mark W. Counts
74204 Elk Creek Road
Rainier, OR 97048

Dave Stevens was interviewed in CS #2 re: The Rocketeer *movie and Tim Truman discussed* The Prowler *in #4 and* Scout: War Shaman *in #5. Expect more in the future.*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Gotham's Gothic Glamour

By ADAM PIRANI

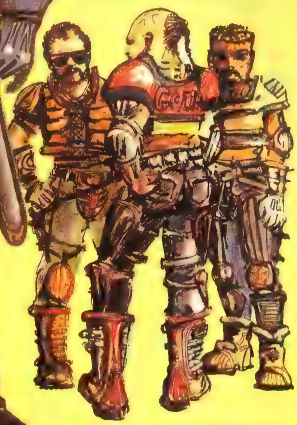
Laboring in the Garment District, costume designer Bob Ringwood sets the style for fearsome fashions.

Meet a future cop, Gotham City chic.

Bruce Wayne only had to glance at what flew through his window to come up with the design for his outfit, but Bob Ringwood had to put considerably more effort into creating something a Caped Crusader could actually wear. As well as designing the costumes for *Excalibur*, *Santa Claus* and *Solarbabies*, Ringwood performed the same services for *Dune*. The rubber "stillsuits" he created for that movie prepared him well for designing Batman's costume.

The process of creating the Darknight Detective's outfit began far away from the

It's the latest craze in crime: Gotham City punks model their fiendish fashions.



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production's base at England's Pinewood Studios. "Michael Keaton was away in Canada [filming *The Dream Team*], so we had to get a body cast," Ringwood notes, "because none of us here knew what size he was, or what shape. We got a body cast, he was in reasonable shape and quite fit, but he wasn't like the comic.

"So then, we sculpted heads and bodies on it, and kept showing them to Tim Burton [the director], until we got something that was close to the comic and would be *believable* on Michael. You don't want to sculpt something that turns him into the incredible Hulk, so that he looks like he's wearing a pneumatic costume. He had to be believable, so in fact the deepest place is only about an inch and a half; he hasn't got a vast great body suit on at all. It was just streamlining *his* body to make it the right outlines, the right sort of proportion.

"One of the things I tried to do is that when he was in the costume, he and it were *one*. I wanted it to be *Batman*, not to be a man dressed up in a costume—although, of course, you know full well that it's Bruce Wayne in a costume.

"It's as though the costume's surface was him and that was his body and that was his head, and if you don't make *that* believable, it doesn't work. In the Adam West show, he was definitely in a costume, you know that was *meant* to be a costume. This, in a way, is meant to be him. When Bruce Wayne's dressed up, it's as though he becomes another animal."

Made of very soft foam rubber glazed with silicone, the finished costume has one main body piece plus head, cloak (made of rubberized wool to facilitate movement), boots and gloves. The main body garment is based on a leotard, with rubber pieces glued on. "It's like a sculpted diving wet suit," Ringwood says. "It's a prosthetic costume that *isn't* glued on. Mostly, prosthetics [such as the Joker's makeup] are all glued on; they're pretending to be part of the skin. This one isn't pretending."

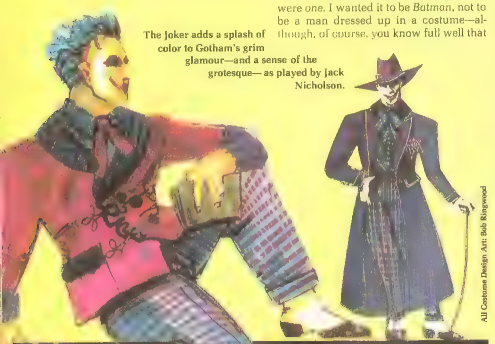
In devising the costume, Ringwood's main guideline from Burton had been that "he wanted it black as opposed to [dark] blue and [light] blue.

"Interestingly, Bob Kane [see page 28] said that although he drew the costume blue and blue, he *couldn't* draw black and black because it doesn't work in comics. It was only two blues to define the different parts of the costume, and it was always black in his mind anyway, it was just colored blue. So, we went ahead and did it black. I don't know whether it loses something or gains something in black. It becomes more sinister and sexy being black, but I quite liked the blue, too. I think you could have done a version in blue that would have been good."

One of the problems of a black costume is that it absorbs light and becomes less visible on film. "That's why we made it shiny, because at least the light then reflects on all the contours," Ringwood notes. "If it was just dull black, it would hardly show up."

Part of the costume's challenge has been to facilitate the smooth transformation of Michael Keaton from Bruce Wayne into the Dark Knight. "Tim wanted to go with Michael whom he had worked with before," Ringwood notes. "Michael isn't what you imagine casting for that part, but then, Tim wanted to play it in a stranger way, a more intellectual way. His rationale behind it was that in the man's fantasy life, at night, he was this big creature, and in the daytime, he was an ordinary guy.

"The basis of [the outfit] was an extension of that idea, so, of course, when he became the Batman at night, we had to give him a costume that would turn him into the shapes of the comic. Even if we didn't make him bigger—you can't suddenly make him 6'4", that would be silly—you *could* give him the outlines. So, you had to give him the chiseled features and the musculature and everything."



The Joker adds a splash of color to Gotham's grim glamour—and a sense of the grotesque— as played by Jack Nicholson.

All Costume Design Art: Bob Ringwood

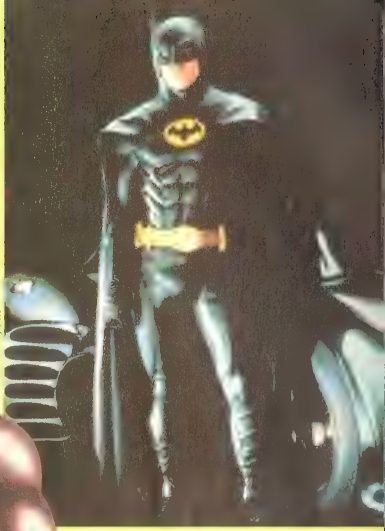
Photo: Murray Close

Prior to his work on this movie, Ringwood hadn't been particularly familiar with the character. "I had seen the TV show a bit when I was younger, but I hadn't really seen many of the Batman comics, and so I bought about 400—from really early ones through every period—and looked at them all. I thought it would be a mistake to do *just* the latest look: You have to get elements of *all* of it. We just tried to get the definitive Batman."

With this end in mind, the moviemakers paid little attention to the TV show.

According to Ringwood, Michael Keaton "quite likes wearing" Batman's uniform.

He really *is* a knight—complete with body armor.



Photos: Murray Close

"I wanted it to be Batman, not a man dressed up in a costume," says Bob Ringwood, who outfitted the Dark Knight.

All Batman Movie Photos: Courtesy Warner Bros Inc.

"It was wise not to look at it anymore," Ringwood says, "because the TV show was another thing, it was a camp series. The whole idea of it was that it was camp and he didn't need to be a sexy guy or anything—Adam West would probably kill me for saying this—but he was a slightly portly man in a thing. The whole point was to do with the jokes and have Eartha Kitt [a guest star as Catwoman] and all the rest of it.

"*This* wasn't about that, so I didn't really want to have any image of that, and I didn't think Tim wanted to either. This is much more like *The Dark Knight*, although it has elements of the rest of it and, of course, the Joker is extremely funny."

Inside the costume, says Ringwood, "it gets quite hot, but it's not as hot as you would think." Although originally it took an hour to put on, that process was soon reduced to "a few minutes," according to the costume designer. "The head part has to be placed properly and then just glued in tiny places so it doesn't slide."

And how did Keaton like the costume? "I noticed that Michael doesn't take it off to go to lunch, so it can't be *that* uncomfortable," Bob Ringwood says. "He quite likes wearing it. He *said* he hates wearing it, but in my experience, anyone who goes to the canteen wearing their costume doesn't dislike it that much!"

REVEALING MY SECRET IDENTITY™

By PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

You wake up one morning. You're floating six feet above your bed. You're invulnerable and you can move as quickly as the Flash. What do you do? Become a superhero, of course. That's the first thing to come to the mind of Andrew Clements, who in his guise as young Jerry (*Stand By Me*) O'Connell has been accidentally blasted by a photon beam into the' syndicated TV series limelight of *My Secret Identity*.

"I'm just a normal 14-year-old boy," says O'Connell, "except I have these superpowers."

The normalcy of O'Connell's character is the show's main selling point, according to co-executive producer Fred Fox Jr. "Even though this is a show about a 14-year-old with superpowers," he maintains, "it's really about a 14-year-old kid growing up and dealing with people. That's difficult enough at that age when you're 'normal,' but these powers make it more difficult. In one show, Andrew felt he had to save the world every second. He promises to take his mother out for her birthday dinner, but because of his craziness, he lets her down. Then, he realizes that his family is important, too.

"One thing that we liked about Andrew is his naivete and enthusiasm. If this show was on six years, every time he flew, it would still be like the first time. He just loves it. His kind of wild innocence makes him very likable. Even sometimes when he tries to play cool with a girl, you can accept it if he says something stupid. We've *all* been there, trying to impress someone and it goes badly. But Andrew just bounces back."

O'Connell himself is less philosophical. "What's normal?" he asks. "Andrew is a lot like me. He loves comics. He collects Marvels. They're the only ones we have on the wall in the bedroom set. Me, I guess you could say I'm a comicholic. There are times when I get my allowance and I go straight to the comic-book store and throw my money at the man: 'Give me a *G.I. Joe* #2!' Then, I'm broke for a week. I'm going to stop collecting *G.I. Joe*," he adds pensively. "I think I'll unload my *G.I. Joes* on the man and start collecting *Iron Man*."

Jerry O'Connell's no ordinary 14-year-old with a scientist pal. He's Ultraman!

A former writer for *Happy Days*, Fox explains, "One of the reasons for that show's success is that it was about a family that everybody wanted to be in." But Andrew's TV family, reflecting modern realities, lacks a father. Dr. Jeffcoate, alias Derek (9 to 5) McGrath, has become a surrogate father figure to Andrew.

"Dr. Jeffcoate tries to keep Andrew from getting crazed," Fox points out, "and Andrew tries to bring Jeffcoate out of his shell. Jeffcoate feels bad because he caused it [Andrews' gaining of superpowers]. He would like to cure Andrew, because he's worried about side effects. But he sees that sometimes Andrew has saved people's lives."

As for Derek McGrath himself, over lunch in the crew cafeteria with O'Connell at his side egging him on, he confesses that Dr. Jeffcoate, as a kid, was a nerd. "Not," he insists, "because he was goofy, or nerdish in the usual sense, in that he talks like this—'McGrath assumes a cartoon-like voice'—'you know you have a nerd here.' I don't think he looks too nerdy, but he's a very, very intelligent and serious person. That would separate him from the other kids who would be more interested in having fun. Jeffcoate started out in life wanting to work hard, and that forces a sort of bookishness on you. It makes the other kids think of you as a nerd. Scientists work so hard, it takes so much time to be successful and go where no man has gone before, that they don't have time to run around."

"You guys want a piece of banana cake?" asks O'Connell ingenuously.

"What? No, you go ahead... If Jeffcoate dedicated himself to becoming a really good dancer, he could do it. He would be very objective about it. He's a very mathematical person. But he also has a great heart. And he loves Andrew."

O'Connell laughs.

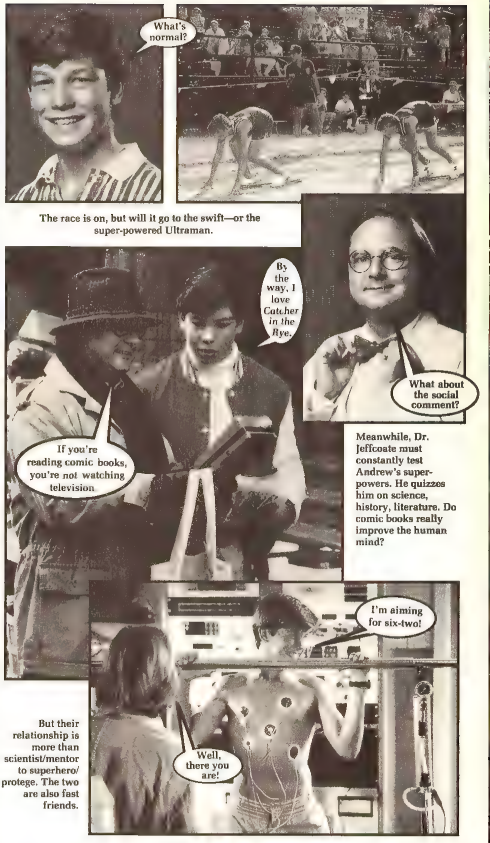
"Jeffcoate is frustrated by Andrew's fascination with comic books," comments McGrath. "I don't think he can see too much value in them. But he doesn't understand them. He has never read them himself. If you forced him to sit down and read 10 comics, he would probably get into some of the more fantastical ones involving science."

"This banana cake is *weird*!" exclaims O'Connell.

"If comics are *all* you read," McGrath continues patiently, "obviously, you're missing an awful lot. Personally, I don't read many comics, but they're *not* what they used to be. Some have a lot of social comment, and some are quite biting. But they're fun and they're entertaining, and they can also be educational."

"And if you get a kid who doesn't read at all," O'Connell maintains, "who says, 'Oh, *Catcher in the Rye*, that's boring,' but who will read a comic, at least he's reading *something*."

"Well, if you're reading comic books, you're probably *not* watching television," McGrath observes wryly.


What's normal?
The race is on, but will it go to the swift—or the super-powered Ultraman.
By the way, I love *Catcher in the Rye*.
What about the social comment?
If you're reading comic books, you're not watching television.
Meanwhile, Dr. Jeffcoate must constantly test Andrew's super-powers. He quizzes him on science, history, literature. Do comic books really improve the human mind?
I'm aiming for six-two!
But their relationship is more than scientist/mentor to superhero/protege. The two are also fast friends.
Well, there you are!

All My Secret Identity Photos: Copyright 1988 MCA TV

Alarmed, Dr. Jeffcoate and Andrews test the surroundings of a local company. This plant may be dumping more than just wastepaper cans. The fate of the entire free world—or at least, their home turf—may rest on this dynamic duo.

But there does come a time when heroes can rest—and enjoy some much-needed leisure with family and friends.

Both actors agree that their characters have benefitted from their friendship. "Jeffcoate's not quite as caustic with Andrew as he was in the beginning," notes McGrath. "He becomes frustrated with Andrew now, but I don't think he gets quite as sharp. I remember the very first line he ever said. Andrew has his shirt off and he's mowing the lawn, and Jeffcoate says, 'Are you mowing the lawn or waiting for a chest X-ray?'

"'Hi, Dr. J. Having a barbeque?'" O'Connell replies, right on cue.

"You could say that. Oh my God, let's not'—but Jeffcoate," McGrath recovers, "has developed a little more social ability than he had before. For instance, he's capable now of actually asking someone out to dinner. That would have been an impossibility for him before Andrew. He couldn't even talk to a woman on the phone. But now that Andrew has been there as a friend, Jeffcoate feels a little more secure. If everything else goes wrong, at least he has his friend. He would be horribly devastated if he lost Andrew's friendship."

"Andrew reads more," says O'Connell.

"He has developed a sense of social responsibility he didn't have before," diagnoses McGrath.

"He has a few more morals," adds O'Connell.

"And he has grown about seven and a half inches," observes McGrath.

"Eight," corrects O'Connell. "I'm aiming for 6'2"."

Mail response to *My Secret Identity* indicates that Andrew may be turning into a role model for other teens. "Yeah," shrugs O'Connell, "that would be great. I would like that. It would be fun."

"It doesn't bother you that maybe people would be affected in the way they live their lives?" prompts McGrath.

"I would still want to be able to walk down the street," replies the young actor.

Despite the rigors of acting in a weekly series, O'Connell does have some time for walking. "I'm only allowed to work eight hours," he explains, "because I'm a minor. And three hours in school. During the week, you can't do anything at night. But I go out on weekends and stuff. It's just like being a normal kid in school."

"Well, it's not quite like being a normal kid," McGrath points out. "I mean, when you're a normal kid, people don't tie your shoes for you, they don't comb your hair for you, make sure you're OK, bring you food, drive you around, make sure you're warm, put your gloves on, stuff like that. They don't do that at school, do they?"

"Uh, no."

"Well, there you are!"

You hear a lot," observes O'Connell, "about two stars on a TV series and they hate each other and they're at each other's throats. But we get along great."

"I'm just grateful you haven't injured me yet," McGrath comments. His remark is prompted by the fact that his young co-star's rapid growth has affected his muscular co-ordination. "What about the time you went flying down the stairs?" McGrath reminds O'Connell. "Remember, you took a nose dive right down, you made this inglorious exit?"

"Oh yeah," laughs O'Connell. "I came running into the lab shouting, 'Dr. J!' and I *bashed* my head at the top of the stair door. I remember seeing stars for a few seconds. I thought it was funny."

"That was *frightening*," responds McGrath. "I was talking about the time when you ran in and couldn't stop and ran right off the stairs—kaboom!"

The conversation turns into a catalog of young O'Connell's *faux pas*: "Remember the time you fell off the stage and almost hurt your foot? What about those two statues you broke? Remember the time. . . ."

"Will you stop? You're making me out to be a klutz. I am not a klutz. I want you to say I'm not a klutz."

"You are not a klutz. Jerry is a very intelligent person," McGrath recites to the air, "growing into his body *very* fast."

It isn't difficult to find things, apart from kibitzing with each other, that both actors enjoy about the comics-inspired TV show. "The flying is fun," O'Connell enthuses.

"It's fun for *me*," his co-star quips. "He's *completely* helpless up on that rig."

"They put me in this big leather girdle," O'Connell explains. "It's like a harness, and they lace me up, stick me on this pole, and they tell me, 'Go like this.'"

"What I like about the flying," McGrath reveals, "is that it takes them a long time to get you into and out of the harness, which means that I get to go and sit in my trailer and relax, take it easy, watch a little television, maybe call a girl. *And* you can't break anything when you're up there. That's the main thing."

"The comedy of *My Secret Identity* is more important than the adventure," declares Jerry O'Connell, getting up from the table to leave for a makeup session.

"It certainly isn't for me. What about the social comment? You know, the show's responsibility to affect the way society sees itself?" replies Derek McGrath, following him off down the corridor and into new adventure. CS

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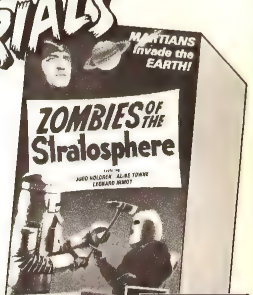

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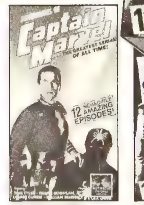

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Dixon

(continued from page 26)

says. "I've always wanted to work with Alex, and the artwork I've seen is absolutely stunning.

"*Demon Blade* is the adventures of a sword," explains Dixon, "*not* the person wielding it. The first person to get it that we're aware of is a nobleman named Nitobe. The sword is a Moramasa sword and the legend behind it is that it was forged by a madman, and so, the sword was infused with his soul. Whoever wields the sword is possessed by it. The only way to break the curse is to kill every member of the Moramasa clan, which leads to a *lot* of fights. Other than that, the only escape is death, and as each person who has the sword dies, the person who takes it from him takes the curse on as well. We'll follow the sword from one hand to another."

While Dixon's fondness for samurai epics fueled his desire to pick up *Young Master*, it was only a phone call to New Comics' Tony Caputo that led to his taking the wheel of the *Speed Racer* spin-off, *Racer-X*.

"I didn't know a damned thing about *Speed Racer*!" laughs Dixon. "I just called to start a rapport. He called me back and said he wanted to change directions on *Racer-X*. So, I came on the book and brought with me Todd Fox, who did some work for Tim on *Scout*, and Enrique Villagran. It's going to have a tougher, leaner look and be more crime-oriented, more realistic and more violent."

In the first issue of his second volume, Racer-X is "involved in moonshine running in Kentucky, and it's all car chases and shoot-outs. In the issue after that, he's in England where a group of terrorists have installed a chemical weapon into a Jaguar and he has to steal it back from them. The title of that is 'Death Rides a Rented Car.' I've *always* wanted to use that title. With *Racer-X*, I want to do the same sort of emphasis on cars that *Airboy* has on aviation, with wild hi-tech cars that are *real*."

And though it may seem that Dixon has time for little else, he has found room on his schedule for *The Time-Jump War*, a three-part mini-series from Apple Comics he's also doing with Enrique Villagran. "It's like something out of '40s science fiction updated for the '80s," he relates. "Enrique brought me drawings of a cavegirl; two heavily armed space people, a man and a woman; and aliens, and said, 'Write a story about *this*.' And so, I did. It's straight-ahead SF action about space warriors from the future who get trapped in Earth's past."

Outside of those assorted series and myriad mini-series, Dixon has little else to do save for his various graphic novel projects. With the aid of Ricardo Villagran, he'll be adapting Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* for First's upcoming Prestige Format *Classics Illustrated* line, and with Jorge Zaffiro, he'll be doing "a very gritty horror book about genetic manipulation in a maximum security prison" called *Seven Block* for Eclipse. And then, there are the books he and Tim Truman are bringing out from their own company, 4Winds.

"Tim and I thought about publishing for a long time, but to work for months and months on new material and then publish it would be a drain on our time as well as our finances," he explains. "So, we're beginning with reprint material, doing a graphic novel every two or three months. We have a very good relationship with Argentine-European publishers, and we're going to exploit that relationship to get the *best* quality reprint material we can. Tim and I are Americanizing the translations. We're not changing the stories at all; we're just making the language more colloquial.

"We just brought out *The Moving Fortress*, which was our first publication. The next one in that series is called *Subterra* or *Underland*, and the third one has a long Spanish title. We haven't translated that into English but we'll be doing that so you'll have the complete saga. We may bring out a few of *Alvar Mayor* [CS #6], but our big book for the fall is going to be Tim's *Wilderness*.

"It's about Simon Girty, who was a renegade white man who joined the Indians and, during the pre-Revolutionary War period through the war, roamed the wilderness of Ohio, Pennsylvania and western New York. People would either write that he was one of the American past's greatest heroes or one of its greatest villains. No one ever had a middle ground. And that fascinated Tim because so many of his characters are like that, but Girty actually walked around. So, he's basing a series on him. I've seen some pages and paintings, and it's the most startling work he has ever done. That will really put 4Winds on the map."

Yet despite the volume of titles he's involved with (and still "other things are tentative," he notes), the writer who found comics far more rewarding than children's books is surprised that anyone thinks his workload is overwhelming.

"I'm always asked about being prolific. I don't know how Mike Baron does it. I see his name everywhere and every story seems to be a labor of love. Tim Truman taught me how to schedule, and that's what it's all about—keeping the calendar, knowing when everything is due, and staying *way* ahead of that. If you can do that, then when you begin to feel, 'Well, maybe I'm hacking this story out, maybe I'm not interested, maybe I didn't do my homework,' you can stop for a month and do your research and go lay by the pool or go for a long drive, so there isn't the deadline pressure. That's the secret," reveals Chuck Dixon. "I see many other guys who seem to write more."

Swamp Thing returns to the screen, but have they mucked him up again?

By WILL MURRAY

Art: Steve Bissette

"I favored conceptually the walking vegetation," admits makeup designer Carl Fullerton, who made Dick Durock resemble the current crop of Swampy.

Comic book fans are forever complaining about the injustices film producers commit on their beloved four-color characters in adaptations for the silver screen. If only, the theory goes, the people who did these movies understood comic books and cared about them, the world would finally see how dramatic and successful realistically portrayed superheroes could be.

Mike Uslan understands these feelings. He's a comics fan. He taught the first accredited university course on comic-book history at Indiana University. He even wrote comics in the mid-70s, including *Batman* and *The Shadow* in its first DC incarnation. A lawyer by training (who once worked for United Artists), these days he's in films and recently co-produced and scripted TV's *Dinosaucers*.

But back in 1980, Uslan was on the edge of realizing a long-cherished dream. With co-producer Ben Melniker, he was

"We cannot do a movie that's on the plane of philosophy of the Alan Moore comic," confesses producer Michael Uslan.

planning a serious, *film noir* feature film version of Batman. While waiting for that project to get off the ground, Uslan and Melniker decided to produce a horror film. They optioned *Swamp Thing* from DC Comics with the hope of making a little money while getting their feet wet as film producers.

"We wanted to make a grade-B monster movie," Uslan explains, "with guys battling it out in rubber suits that harkened back to the days of what we used to pay 25 cents to see on a Saturday afternoon."

Swamp Thing, already bogged down by an embarrassingly obvious creature suit, low production values and virtually no advertising budget, sank amid the fallout of a management change at Avco Embassy, which decided in the middle of the film's initial release not to support it. The movie vanished, but, miraculously, became a cable and video hit.

Now, seven years later, Michael Uslan finds himself in the *deja vu* position of producing another Swamp Thing film while the much-delayed *Batman* is also before the cameras.

This time, however, *The Return of Swamp Thing* isn't being filmed to get experience. It has a definite life of its own. In the intervening years, several Swamp Thing sequels almost came to be. Inspired by the first film's cult following, Hanna-Barbera optioned the character for Saturday morning animation—only to have, in a curious twist of fate, Swamp Thing fall victim of the Smurfs. That cartoon project never got made, but a new animated series is now in development. Then, both HBO and Showtime expressed interest in filming either a made-for-cable sequel or a weekly TV series.

Ultimately, the project developed into another theatrical feature.

But where the first film had been based on a long-dormant property—the original *Swamp Thing* comic, begun by Len Wein and Berni

BALKAN PEAK--!
WELCOME, MY MOSSY FRIEND--
--WE HAVE BEEN EXPECTING YOU!
--NOW HORRIBLY, UNIMAGINABLY, RESURRECTED--TO STAND AS GRINNING MOCKERIES IN A KINGDOM OF THE DEAD...
All Swamp Thing Art & Characters, Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics.
Art: Berni Wrightson

Both producer and director agreed that some of the old Swamp Thing should linger from the Len Wein/Berni Wrightson days. The new "Unmen" are (top to bottom) the horrible Hippoman, the eerie Evolvodude and the grotesque Gatorguy.

Wrightson, had been cancelled in 1976—the sequel came together after DC Comics, perhaps inspired by *Swamp Thing*'s video success, had revived the character under a new artistic team which transformed him into one of the most critically-acclaimed comics series in years. According to Uslan, a calculated decision was made not to simply follow the first film, but to embrace the Alan Moore/Steve Bissette/John Totleben version instead.

"As the filmmakers, we care about the amazing things that are happening in the *Swamp Thing* comic book today," Uslan explains. "What Alan Moore has done, I just have to add my voice to practically everyone else's in admiration for this guy. He's probably the writer who has had the most impact on the comic-book business since Stan Lee. What he and DC Comics artists have done with the strip, it's absolutely wonderful. So, in terms of picking up the character right now, I care to have the story of Swamp Thing and Abby Arcane. That, to me, is a wonderful Beauty and the Beast/Phantom of the Opera love story.

"Going along with that, we've included our interpretation of the Swamp Thing/Abigail love scene that made comic-book history in *Swamp Thing*," Uslan continues. "We've included Swamp Thing's powers to change his form, to move through the Earth, to move through the water in various shapes and to reform into his slightly human plant body. So, we've borrowed heavily from the Alan Moore strip in that regard. Especially for the crucial sequences."

Uslan says that the love scene, which he calls the "tuber sequence," will hew very close to its inspiration.

"It's quite similar to the comic book," he elaborates, "where Abby and Swamp Thing would love to make love. And the only way Swamp Thing knows is the tuber route, which he pries off of his body. Abby takes a bite and the next thing we have is a psychedelic sequence much in the way that Totleben and Bissette drew it, in which Swamp Thing transforms back to Alec Holland, and Abby and Alec make love. Whether it's a dream or not, you're never really sure."

Heather (*Dynasty*) Locklear plays Abigail Arcane, who for this film's purposes is Dr. Arcane's stepdaughter, not his niece. Adrienne Barbeau's character, Alice Cable, is not even mentioned in *The Return of Swamp Thing*, but then, she was only a feminized version of government agent Matt Cable from the Wein/Wrightson days.

If it sounds like *The Return of Swamp Thing* might be a purist's dream, fans of the marsh man shouldn't get their hopes too high.

"This is a general audience *Swamp Thing*," Uslan cautions. "We *cannot* do a movie that's on the plane of philosophy of the Alan Moore comic. We *cannot* reach the kind of audience we need to reach by going into a line-by-line adaptation of the kind of work they've produced so well in the comics. We have a wider audience. Predominantly, we have kids who want to come and see the further adventures of Swamp Thing, who has become a superhero to many of them. We also need to have fun with it. We still need to have the element of humor. There are certain elements that we're bringing to it that in some people's eyes may make it more juvenile, who may even resent the fact that there is humor in it because they take the comic deadly seriously. But you *can't* make a movie for the 100,000 people who follow the comic book. You can attempt to show some respect for the material, and that's what we're trying to do."

In fact, *The Return of Swamp Thing* is less a monster film than it is a superhero movie about a man who happens to be a walking plant. Director Jim (*Not of This Earth*) Wynorski freely admits that he's shooting the film very much in the vein of a James Bond movie. That's not to say he's not a comic fan. He is.

"I read the first 10 issues of the old Berni Wrightson version," Wynorski recalls,

Art: Berni Wrightson

THE EDGE OF THIS SWAMP—AND THIS BUSH. WE'D OLD MAN ARCANE. HE RISED LIKE AN AGING APPARITION INTO A SWAMP THING. HE'S GOT—A SWEET-SMELLING SWAMP WIFE—AND PROMISES—AND MEMORIES—THAT BEING ONLY MAN.
STORY: LEN WEIN ART: BERNI WRIGHTSON
SWAMP THING

Art: Berni Wrightson/Colors: Tatjana Wood

It all started with a swamp thing in *House of Secrets* #92, and will continue when the creature's creators, Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, reunite in a forthcoming Prestige Format limited series.

On the new movie, director Jim Wynorski says that Louis Jourdan has grown into Berni Wrightson's version of Arcane.

Art: Berni Wrightson/Colors: Tatjana Wood

Planting Swamp Thing

Although the saga of the Swamp Thing seems to have a clear enough beginning, there was actually more to his origin than burning chemicals and a nearby bog. And as Berni Wrightson reveals, the transformation of Alec Holland had nothing to do with a criminal's murderous intents or even

the manipulations of an immortal Parliament of Trees.

"Len Wein did a script for *House of Secrets* that had no title, and it was the best thing he had ever written," the artist explains. "He showed it to me and said, 'Would you like to do this?' And I said, 'Yeah! I would, I would!'

"Of course, I was up to my ears in other work, and finally, they decided the only way they were going to get me to do it was to put a *tight* deadline on it. And I did that thing in a *weekend*. I had a lot of help. Mike Kaluta, Al Weiss and Jeff Jones all did some work on it. I think it took four days to do this, and it *still* didn't have a title. Len kept saying, 'When are you going to work on that swamp thing?' The time came to title it and that was it."

But that wasn't the end of it. Sales soared on that issue, *House of Secrets* #92, and readers' letters told DC why.

"What felt like a year went by, and I was out of town for two or three days," Wrightson recalls. "When I came back, people were coming up to me, saying, 'Oh, that's really good news about you and Len.' And I said, 'What are you talking about?' 'Well, you know, the book.' I said, 'What book?' It had been discussed and decided that they wanted to revive Swamp Thing and make it into a *series*, and I was the last one to know! So, I went to the office, and sure enough, [then-editor] Joe Orlando had approached Len about it. We talked about repairing and then expanding on that original short story, but we decided to redo it in contemporary times."

However, thanks to "the Comics Code, restrictions on what we could do with the character, and prevailing characterizations of horror and superheroes," taking that direction put them on a quite limited path. Despite the awards and adulation their brief run on the series would accumulate, for Wrightson, it wasn't long before the bloom was off *Swamp Thing*.

"By the time I quit, the tenth issue, we had taken the character about as far as it could go," he notes. "From the third or fourth issue on, I felt that it had turned into a monster-of-the-issue sort of thing, and well, I got bored with it.

"After Len and I both left, I felt bad to see what the other guys were doing, because they weren't doing anything new or innovative with the character. They were just taking all the stuff we had set up and continued to run it further into the ground until there was nothing left to do but kill him off. It took somebody with that really twisted imagination, like Alan Moore, to come along and see a potential in this dead character. I really enjoyed what he, Steve Bissette and John Totleben did."

But now, more than a decade after their last issue together, the arboreal wonder's creators are preparing to once more forage through that fearful foliage. Even as Michael Uslan and Jim Wynorski (see article) are releasing another adventure of the Hollywood version, so too are Wein and Wrightson planning the return of their own Swamp Thing.

"We tried occasionally since *Swamp Thing* to come together and do things, and nothing ever really happened for one reason or another. I felt that maybe Len wasn't ready to do it again, and for a long time, I didn't feel ready. I still felt too close to the character. Then last summer, I saw Len in Chicago at a convention, and he said, 'Hey, how would you like to do a Swamp Thing project?' And I just immediately said yes because it felt *right*.

"This is going to be a three-book limited series in the Prestige Format. It involves time travel, and we're going to be working with our original conception of the Swamp Thing *and* Alan Moore's conception *and* a few incarnations that we're just making up. I don't want to give too much of the story away, but," promises Wrightson, "it's a *lot* of fun."

—*Daniel Dickholtz*

who Arcane transforms into Cockroachman, a slug and Hippoman. He's going to have a mutant menagerie in his lab."

FX artists Steve Neill and Todd Masters are responsible for the new mutations, chief of whom is the blood-drinking, brain-sucking Leechman, played by Chris Doyle. But don't expect to see Dr. Arcane back as the boar-headed alligator creature he was transformed into before his death at the end of *Swamp Thing*. This Arcane is a clone of the original, and this time, he more resembles the Arcane of the comics, according to Wynorski.

"Arcane was a wizened old bald-headed guy in the comics," he notes. "In the seven-year hiatus between *Swamp Thing* I and II, Louis Jourdan is more into looking like Arcane than he did last time. He's still suave and slimy, but he looks more like the character."

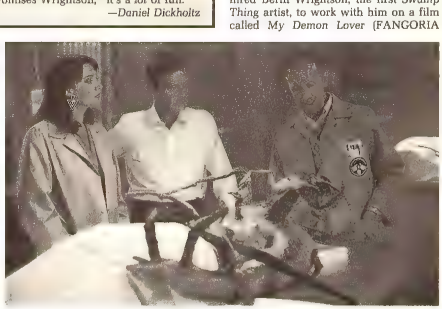
The movie's script, which was a carryover from the aborted HBO cable film project, is the work of Neil Cuthbert and Grant Morris, "who we brought in to do a second draft," Uslan remarks, "when we wanted to angle the slant on the humor a little bit more." When Jim Wynorski came aboard, he requested—and got—numerous script changes. Some of these revisions included the dumping of an absurd mutant baby character, larger roles for the two humorous kids, Darryl and Omar, and a heavier dose of James Bondian action in the form of Arcane's hi-tech security forces. Many daylight scenes were changed to night shots for atmospheric purposes, as well as to lessen the strain on the man in the Swamp Thing suit.

The responsibility for creating the new Swamp Thing is Carl Fullerton's. With a team of sculptors and assistants, including Neil Martz, Fullerton designed a brand new foam latex bodysuit for Dick Durock (see STARLOG #142). By an interesting coincidence, Fullerton once hired Berni Wrightson, the first *Swamp Thing* artist, to work with him on a film called *My Demon Lover* (FANGORIA

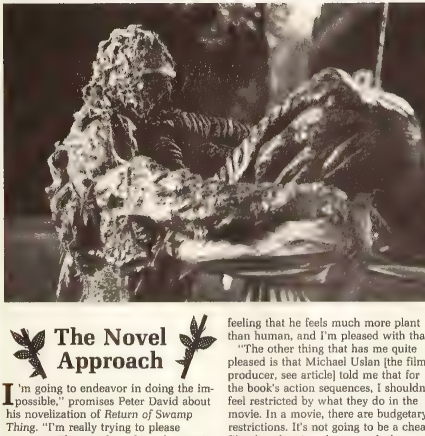
"and I read the new version. I went more for the old Swamp Thing."

That's not totally at odds with Uslan's view because *The Return of Swamp Thing* hasn't entirely shaken off the Wein/Wrightson influence.

"Going back to the earliest comic books," Uslan says, "Arcane always had his Unmen, crazy mutations of all shapes and sizes. There was a guy with one hand who used to walk around. A guy with feet but no hands. All kinds of misshapen forms. We're using a lot of that from the Wein and Wrightson days through the Alan Moore stories. We have humans



Lana (Sarah Douglas), Dr. Arcane (Louis Jourdan) and Dr. Rochelle (Ace Mask) discuss an end to their latest patient, Cockroachman, before he multiplies.



Unhindered by budget restraints, writer Peter David can unleash Swamp Thing's full power against Leechman in the film's novelization.

The Novel Approach

I'm going to endeavor in doing the impossible," promises Peter David about his novelization of *Return of Swamp Thing*. "I'm really trying to please *everyone*. The people making the movie don't want it to be typed totally from the script. Their main concern is that they don't want the book to be 'R-rated,' but they're being *extremely* flexible, so I'm filling in lots of back story.

"Basically, I'm treating Swamp Thing the way Alan Moore [see page 14] did in terms of the presentation," adds the *Incredible Hulk* and *Dreadstar* writer. "I'm giving him the stilted delivery and the feeling that he feels much more plant than human, and I'm pleased with that.

"The other thing that has me quite pleased is that Michael Uslan [the film's producer, see article] told me that for the book's action sequences, I shouldn't feel restricted by what they do in the movie. In a movie, there are budgetary restrictions. It's not going to be a cheap film, but there's only so much they can do. I can basically use the powers at Swamp Thing's command. They don't have the money to create multiple Swamp Thing outfits so that he can have multiple bodies. I can do it. I can put on the printed page: 'Suddenly, moss had started coming together and rising up, and the Leechman turned around to see the Swamp Thing behind him, and next to him, and in front of him. "*You. . . should not. . . have come here. . .*" said Swamp Thing.' "

David describes the movie as "a good 'B' monster film. It doesn't have the literacy of an Alan Moore comic. It doesn't have that level of sophistication; it *can't*. You can get away with more in the comic book. Moore's dialogue is very naturalistic, but the thing that separated his *Swamp Thing* was his prose style. You can't have prose style in a movie."

The author faced a "hairy" problem in the platinum-haired form of Abby, portrayed by blonde bombshell Heather Locklear in the film. "I didn't want to say in the book that she has white hair with black streaks, since Heather Locklear doesn't," he says. "What I've done is something to the effect of, 'She *used* to have her hair streaked, but eventually she decided she was tired of people making skunk jokes, so she dyed the whole thing blonde.'

"I've tossed in all kinds of things to send a flag to the comic readers, going, 'Hey, guys, I'm out there for you. I'm trying to make this a book that you too will enjoy,' " concludes Peter David. "The comic fans are *very* particular in the way the characters are translated on the screen, God knows. They feel that *any* translation to the screen should be as faithful to the comic as possible, even when that's *not* possible. In the book, I can be much more faithful to Swamp Thing than the movie can possibly be, and I'm just using every opportunity I have to do that, so that everyone will be pleased."

—Michael McAvennie

#63). But he decided *not* to consult with Wrightson during the new suit's creation.

"I know Berni," Fullerton says, "and I can't say enough nice things about him. Everybody knows he's a fabulous artist. But I was reticent to approach him, especially since I had the DC comic. I didn't see any point in it. Also, I was fearful of hurting his feelings, of saying, 'Gee, I favor this approach better than your approach.' And in all fairness, that was true. I think it lent itself to a suit better than the original concept."

The DC comic Fullerton mentions is the trade paperback *Saga of Swamp Thing*, which became the production's sourcebook.

"You need a person with a very flat face to get away with this at all," Fullerton explains. "The Swamp Thing renderings that we were working from were very viney and devoid of mass. You could stick your hand in it. It was like walking vegetation. The Berni Wrightson rendering I saw was more solid. I favored conceptually the walking vegetation and Swamp Thing's ability to change form."

Fullerton's respect for the Steve Bissette/John Totleben version of Swamp Thing went beyond simply sculpting a flexible suit that would closely resemble the character's current look.

"In hoping to attain the vegetation of the body and lose the massiveness of his form," Fullerton reveals, "we tried to incorporate lots of different roots, leaves and foliage. The one thing I specifically remember wanting to do, and seeing in the DC comic, was how lighting was so important. Many times you never see Swamp Thing's eyes or mouth. Very seldom do you see the nose. I hoped that by adding that triangulation to his face, and keeping it rootlike, you could have light shining through it when you want to. You could have it very ominous looking and shadowy when you never want to see his mouth or lips move when he's speaking—as well as the very simple approach of the extended eyebrows where he could be looking down, and you wouldn't see what's contained in his eyes. You would just see this big hulk of a mass speaking to you."

Still, foam latex does not make for a convincing character. "One of the reasons this production is moving so successfully is Dick Durock," Mike Uslan notes. "You must have a person who can handle the intense physical pressures as a result of this heavy costume in intense heat. You also need somebody who can just grin and bear it and be a real-life superhero for you. Whether the conditions are extreme and you have to keep going to get a particular shot, or whether there are a bunch of kids visiting on the set and want Swamp Thing's autograph, this guy, in his own right, is a superhero kind of person."

Uslan's frequent invoking of young fans is a tip-off to the target audience at which *The Return of Swamp Thing* is aiming. In fact, there are plans to film environmental TV spots using Swamp Thing as a latter-day Smokey the Bear. And among the cast is a pair of comic-relief kids whom Uslan calls "the Spanky and Alfalfa of the '80s."

Most of the principals also see this as a

(continued on page 66)

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When David Campiti reunites the "Hero Alliance," there must be a reason why.

By DREW BITTNER

David Campiti isn't the only man in comics to get this kind of second chance. But he's only one of a handful.

Back in 1986, after much publicity, he brought out the graphic novel *Hero Alliance: End of the Golden Age*, with co-writer Kevin Juaire and artists Ron Lim, Michael Witherby and Bart Sears. The graphic novel was intended to kick off a series dedicated to following the lives of heroes "between the fight scenes."

It lasted *one* issue and vanished.

Now, however, "Innovation is putting a great deal of time, effort and money into getting *Hero Alliance* to work and advance sales so far are coming out best on this book," Campiti says. "I'm very happy to be able to get this thing off the ground again. I've been involved with about 200 comics over the years, but I've gotten more mail on *Hero*

Alliance than on any other thing. It's odd, but the graphic novel had a limited print run of 12,000 copies, of which fewer than 7,000 were distributed. A month later, the first regular color comic came out and sold more than 33,000 copies. It's odd to think that the story that you must read for the first issue to make complete sense sold only a *sixth* as well as the first issue."

Working solo now, since former co-writer Kevin Juaire has retired from comics writing, Campiti remembers clearly how difficult it was to get *Hero Alliance* going the first time around.

"*Hero Alliance* actually started with a company called Sirius Comics in 1984," Campiti says. "They had come out with *Greylore*, the *Gnatrat* parody and *Tales of the Sun Runners*, and they were looking for a very strong superhero group with a sense of history to it. They wanted something along the lines of what had then just come out in *Warrior* magazine with Miracleman. I developed a series with Kevin Juaire and we actually pitched them half-a-dozen concepts. They told us what they liked and what they didn't like, and we ended up combining several different series proposals to come up with *Hero Alliance*."

Campiti adds that the plan was always to focus on the characters themselves. "The final concept was to be a series of stories about super characters where you *didn't* have to worry about the fight scenes. That wasn't important. We were concerned with what happened *between* the fights. There have been so many super-team books out there where the latest planet-eating menace is out to destroy Earth *again*; when you keep trying to top yourself cosmically that way, the incidental stuff, the people stuff, doesn't seem to be that important. However, when I was reading comics in the '60s and early '70s, some of what appealed to me the most was when Stan Lee and Steve Ditko and later John Romita were doing *Spider-Man*. I was much more interested in the 10 pages per issue, nine panels per page, which had Peter Parker with his friends. I always viewed the fight scenes as filler."

The *Hero Alliance* revival will begin by using material from the graphic novel and the first issue, which has been revised and expanded to include new artwork and story background for a three part bi-weekly mini-series (which was slated for March release). Issues of the original series that weren't previously published will be similarly treated, so that the new series of *Hero Alliance* will be launched this month.

That's the book's format, but the focus isn't on fights.

The Sentry may prefer to deal with street crime, but a spaceship crash in *Hero Alliance* will launch his solo series.

Art: Ron Lim/Michael Wilkerby/Colors: Marcus David

After 20 years of conflict, the heroes will only now learn of Sepulchre's true villainy.

Art: Barr Snow/Bill Anderson

All New Alliance Characters Trademark & Copyright 1998 Innovation Corp.

Art: Ron Lim/Michael Wiltberly/Colorist Marcelo David

"We start the mini-series with background on Victor, who's turning out to be the main character. We give you his history with about five pages of the group's history. You get the feeling that these heroes have been around for decades, that all the background should be there, so you don't come into it reading the first story and feeling like you're starting from scratch. The heroes interrelate with one another as individuals. They're not necessarily in costumes, not necessarily calling themselves by superhero names.

Art: Bart Sears/ Rick L. Bryant

"Figure it this way: The supergroup *isn't* a formal gathering of heroes. It's more like individuals who naturally seek each other's company because of a common ground. There might even be a special counseling group to help heroes deal with their unique lifestyle."

The first couple of issues, in fact, will deal with someone who has a superpower which is essentially non-heroic. Martin Weiss is able to perceive the world at superspeed, so that he can count the beats of a hummingbird's wings. In trying to be a hero, Martin discovers that superpowers are not always "super."

With this in mind, Campiti hopes that characterization will focus attention more on the person than on the powers. Who the characters are is more important to Campiti than what they can do.

"We have Victor, whose normal name is Vic Torrence. He's pushing 50, so you're not talking a generic 29-year-old hero. He has been active for about 20 years, maybe more. He belonged to the Guardmen when the Golden Guardman [the *original* superhero] brought him along and taught him how to be a hero. As a hero who could fly, is strong and basically invulnerable, Victor didn't have to do a whole lot of thinking on his own because the Golden Guardman was always there. Now, if a hero can do all this but hasn't had the perspective of being a leader, what happens when the Golden Guardman disappears or dies? How does Victor cope with that? We see Victor trying to deal with individual heroes to organize them into a team and trying to deal with the Golden Guardman's death, but frankly, he's not equipped for it.

Chris Dunlop, the Golden Guardsman's daughter, decides to become a hero to help Victor get all this started," Campiti says. "She has been a high school teacher for several years." The public exposure of her father's identity and her own heroic activities, though, have a major negative effect on her personal life.

"We also deal with Bob and Steve Shayne, who are the heroes Gemini Plus. They share the powers of a dead brother between them. Only one of the two has superpowers at a time. We see how the two of them take to the popularity and notoriety that being a hero can bring, and how they handle it differently," Campiti explains.

He also mentions that Tawny Winters, a supermodel who was created by current *Justice League Europe* artist Bart Sears, has a very subtle power, one that many readers may not pick up at first glance: She seems different to everyone who sees her.

"Just as Victor is the embodiment of everything everyone wants to be, Tawny Winters is the embodiment of everything everyone wants *her* to be," Campiti says.

The bad guys will also be personality-oriented. Sepulchre, a villain seen in the graphic novel, is described by Campiti as similar to Marvel's Mysterio. "He seems to have a lot of power, and he's ugly, but the ugly part is only a mask. He causes only enough of a ruckus to be arrested for disturbing the peace."

As a result, the heroes don't take Sepulchre seriously. Campiti warns that this is a mistake, because "there have been a number of serial murders. Sepulchre, in his normal, soft-spoken identity, is doing this. And the Guardmen let him go 16 times over 20 years . . ."

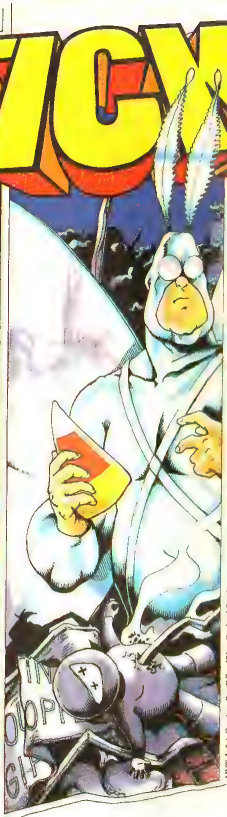
(continued on page 66)

TICK TICK TICK

Amidst superhero silliness, Ben Edlund's creation latches on to fans.

By T.L. JOHNS

All Tick Art & Character Trademark & Copyright 1988, 1989 Ben Edlund



All Tick Art: Courtesy Ben Edlund/New England Comics

Anyone who follows his adventures knows he's not an insect but what exactly *The Tick*, the hero of New England Comics' first published series is, is still a mystery, even to the character's creator Ben Edlund.

Within the pages of this bi-monthly black and white book is a '40s style superhero sporting animated antennae and most likely jumping from rooftop to rooftop leaving crumbled masonry in his wake. One would also encounter a host of questionably familiar, yet incompetent, guest heroes. And then, of course, there are the ninjas.

The search for the Tick's true identity begins with soft-spoken writer and artist 20-year-old Ben Edlund. A Pembroke, Massachusetts native, Edlund reveals he's an artist from a family of artists.

"I've always been drawing, ever since I was a kid, and it was something I was naturally doing. My father's an artist and my mother went to art school. And for 10 years, we had an artist living with us, one of my parents' friends. It was sort of a commune, a very good environment to grow up in to become an artist."

After attending Silver Lake Regional High School, Edlund spent two years at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. He also admits that while he did

Art: Ben Edlund/Mex Banks

The names (and some of the costumes) have been changed to protect the innocent in the bugged-out world of Tick.

read a few comics as a youngster, Edlund's biggest influence came from the now-defunct magazine *Epic Illustrated*.

"I could never read comics when I was a kid," Edlund says. "The only ones I ever read were *Richie Rich* and stuff like that, or maybe some *Swamp Things*. But when I was about 10, I started to read *Epic* and that I really got into. Some really nice fantasies like some of Richard Corben's and Arthur Suydam's work is what drew me into comics."

Edlund broke into the business by having a quickly sketched poster in the legendary right place at the right time.

"One of my friends was working as a manager at New England Comics. He knew that one of the owners was looking for some art material because they were interested in doing a comic. One day when we were going in to pick up comics, I brought in some of the stuff I was working on—I was writing and drawing this small comic that wasn't published.

"But I brought some samples in from that. They looked them over and liked them enough to take me on as this guy who would wait around for them to get their act together. At first, they had several comics they wanted to pursue, all with different writers and I was going to be the artist. They just kept me hanging for about six months and eventually, as a result of some jokes, the Tick was created.

"A sketch of the character showed up in the store itself and they saw it and decided they were going to publish it! I found it distressing at the time because I had absolutely no story behind it and they decided to have me write it—though they were cautious about just throwing me in a writing position, especially with a character that had *no* background."

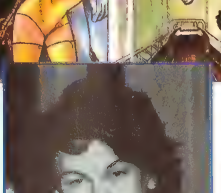


Photo: Traci Johns

"I'm very cynical when it comes to superheroes. I can't believe that they would exist," admits Tick creator Ben Edlund.

And despite all the rumors that have been going around, and the explanation given in issue #1 by editor George Suarez, Edlund gives the true origin of the Tick.

"We were playing sandlot football, and the first time it came up was because someone we were playing against just couldn't be dropped; we couldn't tackle him at all. And I decided to go the psychological warfare route by calling him something that complimented him in that he was unstoppable and uncrushable, 'The Tick.' The nickname hung with him for a few weeks because this was a game where all of the people who worked at our supermarket played. Eventually, someone came to me and asked me to draw this character so the insult could keep on going. So, I did, and one of the sketches where I was just fooling around is the one that ended up at NEC."

But as to the character's background, Edlund says he'll let his readers know in insightful chunks. And as he decides what it is himself.

"I'm working on the Tick's background. That's the chief motive for making him an amnesiac," the writer/artist explains. "He can't remember anything because there *wasn't* anything for him to remember at the time. But I'm starting to write more conclusively about where he came from. I've gone through many different ideas. It started out that he was this very brilliant mathematician and he annexed his personality into the back of his head just as he was coming to this great breakthrough, but that was a little too science fictiony. He's becoming more and more just someone who has had a suburban life who decides to end it by escaping, and he's aided in some ways by superpowers. I'm still cautious about making commitments about his background."

What we do know for certain is that the Tick guards a place called The City. Edlund and NEC thought it would be fun to set *The Tick* in Boston, but Edlund says he would want to make the backdrops recognizable to the locals. For now, he is simply making boxy buildings set most

Art: Ben Edlund

After suffering so much damage from the Tick, The City finally takes its revenge.

"It's an absurdist humor I get into, like Monty Python," says Edlund.

Having disposed of those pesky ninjas, the Tick will move to new frontiers battling the Russian menace, Red Scare.

"If the plot calls for it," Tick's *nigh* invulnerability won't mean a thing. It ain't got that swing.

Tick Art: Ben Edlund/Robert Polio

probably somewhere "near the midwest."

We also know the Tick loves jumping around on rooftops, although the roofs are a little worse for wear because of it. The Tick doesn't suck blood, although it makes for some great jokes. He also loves gadgets and in the future, he may have more of them to show off. And here's a Tick trivia tidbit: When the hero proclaims he is "nigh" invulnerable, according to Edlund that means he is conveniently invulnerable and can be hurt "if the plot calls for it."

Readers of *The Tick* may notice feature and costume similarities between other heroes the Tick meets and well-known, mainstream characters. Edlund notes the similarities are only surface deep and he has had no problems from the larger comic companies or fans.

"Just before [issue #1] came out, many people were worried because Clark Oppenheimer looks a lot, if not exactly, like Clark Kent. But nothing happened. They would really have to stretch to go for similarities in other characters. I don't try to make the names close, or at least part of them. That's the *next* funniest thing we can do because of *Mad* magazine running the whole gamut with Clark Tent and Clark Bent and the rest.

"I have people who write in, fans, who say this is a lampoon type of humor and they like it. But from my point-of-view, it's more like paying homage. I don't know if there is a truly *mean* parody, except those that come out and then just [snap] disappear. Or the vicious parodies. They're funny, but that's something where you have to want to make an attack. I'm just using the whole of comics as a backdrop for this one character and all the characters I'm going to make in the future. I would call it nice.

"Really, I'm the *last* person who should be writing this kind of superhero book," he confesses. "I'm *very* cynical when it comes to superheroes. I *can't* believe that they would exist. It's like a new mythology for America, which doesn't have that good of a mythology anyway. It's the closest to a polytheistic type of thing as far as Superman, Batman and all. They're very much like myths to people who read them. It's fascinating from a sociological point-of-view."

Even though he is a newcomer, Edlund is getting a great deal of backing from NEC. And while black and white comics don't hold the status they once did, and Edlund wouldn't mind seeing *The Tick* go to color, he's happy with black and white for now. His work is inked by Max Banks (an assistant art director for NEC) and lettered by Bob Polio.

Beside the comics, there's merchandising. There will be a set of four Tick-inspired buttons, one of the Tick in The City, one with the Tick logo and a picture of a real tick, one of the Tick's dog and a

(continued on page 66)

Swamp Thing

(continued from page 58)

kid's picture.

"I have done many pictures that are aimed at 12 to 20-year-olds," Wynorski admits. "But they also have a quirky humor that can be appreciated through to the Yuppie crowd."

"Without trying to sound too hokey," Dick Durock says, "I think kids like the character. That was the intent. Little kids will visit the set and first of all they would have a little bit of fear. Then, they see what Swamp Thing does. He's not one of those 'Rahhrr,' Hulk-type things. He *is* a nice guy. That's why we try to dissuade people from saying the Swamp Monster or even Creature—because it has connotations of being something nasty."

But Durock doesn't agree with the characterization of Swamp Thing as a superhero. At least, not by *his* definition of "superhero."

"'Superhero' has connotations of Superman," he explains. "I always thought that Superman was campy in a sense that Swamp Thing isn't. He's campy, but he's more honestly sensitive. I think, than Superman/Clark Kent. Because I look at Clark Kent and I say, 'Geez, it's intentional, but this guy's a *boob*.' Which Swamp Thing isn't. He's just trapped by circumstances."

Durock's casual mention of the dreaded C word—"camp"—is likely to set alarm bells ringing among comics fans. Will *The Return of Swamp Thing* be camp? It depends on who you ask. Jim Wynorski says yes—if you consider old movie serials camp. Mike Uslan says no—If you use the *Batman* TV show as your yardstick for campiness.

If *The Return of Swamp Thing* does end up as camp, even with a comics fan/writer/historian as co-producer, does that mean that comic-book characters simply cannot be realistically replicated on the big screen?

"Comics can work as movies," Mike Uslan insists. "There are different approaches you can take to it. You can attempt to be a purist—which is the most difficult of all because comics can reach a very narrow audience. Movies or television have to reach the largest possible audience. The other side of the coin is you use the comic as a starting base. You use it as inspiration and you go off and reach the kind of audience you want to reach. I really can't take the 'sophisticated suspense'—as *Swamp Thing* comic books are billed—and the philosophy of the Alan Moore tales, which are brilliant, and reach the audience I want to by doing a completely faithful adaptation. That's not what we're trying to do here. Some people will love this movie. Some people will not love this movie. But overall, in terms of reaching the largest audience, I'm real proud of what's being done on *The Return of Swamp Thing*."

Alliance

(continued from page 62)

Campiti notes that a permanent penciller for the series has yet to be contracted. Ron (*Silver Surfer*) Lim's two unpublished issues from the original series will be released. Then, Craig Brasfield may become regular artist.

The popularity of *Hero Alliance* will determine the feasibility of other plans Campiti says are currently in the works, including two spin-off bi-monthly series. One will feature Victor; the other is about a Shadow-like character, the Sentry.

Campiti will be writing *Hero Alliance*, but won't necessarily pen the spin-offs.

"Bart Sears contacted me about writing for the Sentry spin-off. He showed me some story ideas and I said A) write them up and send me a script; and B) make sure this doesn't conflict with your DC contract. If it all works out, Bart may be writing some of *The Sentry* for us."

Tony Isabella is another possible writer for *Sentry*. "For some reason, everybody is turning in scripts for *Sentry*," Campiti muses. "They seem to really like him. I would like to do that book with fully painted pages. It's something the fans like, and it's a style I really enjoy."

Campiti's other projects for Innovation Publishing include an offbeat romance-oriented two-parter entitled *Scandals*, to include stories by Mike Baron, William Messner-Loebs and Marv Wolfman. Campiti is also publishing *Justice Machine* and *Cobalt Blue* with Mike Gustovich, as well as a signed, limited hardcover edition of the original graphic novel, topped off by a Ron Lim/Bill Anderson *Hero Alliance* poster.

"We've got a ton of things in the works. Our aim is to publish eight color books a month," Campiti says. And *Hero Alliance*, with its two potential spin-offs, looks to be a large part of that effort.

With *Hero Alliance*, "I'm really interested in showing that having superpowers *doesn't* solve problems. I did some *Superman* stuff for [DC editor] Julie Schwartz, so I'm aware of what DC's attitudes toward Superman were at the time. I'm making sure I don't tread on that ground. Superman was concerned mainly with superpowers and superfeats. That's not important to me."

For Dave Campiti, first and foremost, the characters are what matter. He says he would much prefer to do character studies "rather than Doctor Doom part four comes in to take over the United States. Everybody has seen that stuff. How many times can you fight the Lizard?"

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Tick

(continued from page 66)

solo button of the Tick himself. There will even be a Tick "hypno-disc." Edlund notes that there may be T-shirts, posters and a Prestige Format edition of the first several issues published in conjunction with his making convention appearances and selling a *few* pieces of his original artwork. "I'll never sell it all," he comments. "I want to keep as much of it as I can."

The writer/artist says he would also like to see some off-the-wall products being made to celebrate the uniqueness of *The Tick*, such as Tick straws (a big joke in issue #1) or even Tick dolls.

As for the hero's future, fans will be able to enjoy new characters and more characterization. Edlund is working feverishly to finish the next three issues to keep up the bi-monthly pace while he takes off for a five-month bicycling tour of Europe with his brother. Issues #4 and #5 will see the Tick and Oedipus finishing the ninja business that have been bogging them. But in issue #6, readers will meet the Tick's new nemesis—Red Scare.

"The Red Scare is this very classic Russian superhero. The rough plot is that there's this one smart, very capitalistic promoter who decides he can make money off of superheroes by selling them super-villains to fight," he reveals. "There are no real motives to be a super-villain. If you're going to make money off of crime, the *worst* thing to do is draw attention to yourself. So, Red Scare is this super-villain created to help superheroes build their reputations. He's actually Scottish and just pretending to be Russian."

Other new characters will include a group of rebellious Amish-types whom the Tick will try to help in their fight against the government; Agrippa, who is the Roman god of aqueducts; a possible group of ineffective superheroes based in New York City; and the long-awaited introduction of the audience to the Tick's sidekick and information liaison, the Moth.

"The seventh issue will be the transitional issue to start getting into a new storyline. And I have several choices to make. It could be the militant Amish thing, which would be kind of fun, or I could start the road trip with the Moth to New York."

Edlund does have other interests. He's a musician and he's very interested in getting into any aspect of film, specifically fantasy and special FX films. But for now, fans needn't worry about losing *The Tick*.

"Doing a comic is about the freest amount of unhampered creativity that I could do and be published. I could go off into the movies, but there would be 40 people involved saying, 'You can't do this because of this, you can't do that.' At least with the publishing arrangement I have here, it really is whatever I want to do," says Ben Edlund. "And it's neat."

COMICS REPORTER

Everything's Archie

With his two newest films (*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and *Lethal Weapon 2*) due for release soon, screenwriter Jeff Boam is preparing for his next project.

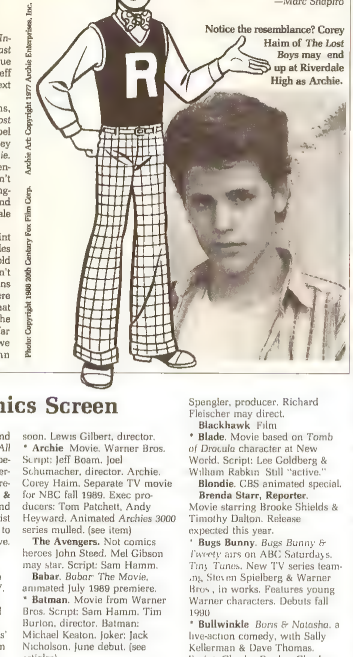
Pending final negotiations, Boam will reteam with his *Lost Boys* colleagues, director Joel Schumacher and actor Corey Haim on a film version of Archie. Haim is slated to play the perennial teen. As for Boam, he isn't sure what his approach to bringing Archie, Jughead, Veronica and the rest of the gang at Riverdale High to the screen will be.

"I have *no idea* at this point what I'm going to do," concedes Boam. "I've gone through my old Archie comics, but they haven't helped. There are many questions that must be answered. Where does the movie take place? What will be the tone and the look of the film? And most importantly, as far as I'm concerned, how do we *avoid* making another John Hughes teen movie?"

Archie, of course, remains one of the last bastions of comic-book innocence. Boam agrees that innocence will be the key to doing this movie right.

"If that element of innocence can't be effectively translated to the screen," he says. "It will appear totally outdated. The *Archie* characters do certain things and come with certain conditions. What makes this project interesting to me is the challenge of finding a handle on those conditions and making them work as a film."

—*Marc Shapiro*



Notice the resemblance? Corey Haim of *The Lost Boys* may end up at Riverdale High as Archie.

Photos: Copyright 1988 20th Century Fox Film Corp. Archie Art: Copyright 1977 Archie Enterprises, Inc.

The Comics Screen

These characters are bound for another medium. All projects are live-action unless specified. Those marked by an asterisk have changed status since previous listing. **Attn: comics & media pros:** Clarifications and other info to be added to this list are cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016.

The Adjuster. Character from Marvel & Columbia Pictures TV.

The Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters. Animated series. Rankin-Bass, producers

The Airtight Garage. Moebius' SF graphic novel. Animated film from Productions Pascal Blais & Starwatcher Graphics.

The American. Dark Horse Comics hero. Film or TV series.

American Flagg! Movie.

* **Annie.** Separate movie & Broadway musical sequels in development. Movie may film soon. Lewis Gilbert, director.

* **Archie.** Movie. Warner Bros. Script: Jeff Boam. Joel Schumacher, director. Archie. Corey Haim. Separate TV movie for NBC fall 1989. Exec producers: Tom Patchett, Andy Heyward. Animated *Archies 3000* series mulled. (see item)

The Avengers. Not comics heroes John Steed. Mel Gibson may star. Script: Sam Hamm.

Babar. *Babar The Movie*, animated July 1989 premiere.

* **Batman.** Movie from Warner Bros. Script: Sam Hamm. Tim Burton, director. Batman: Michael Keaton. Joker: Jack Nicholson. June debut. (see articles)

Beetle Bailey. Movie. Animated TV special in development. Script: Hank Saroyan.

James Bond. New Timothy Dalton 007 film, *License to Kill*, opens this summer.

Betty Boop. Movie. Pierre Spengler, producer. Richard Fleischer may direct.

Blackhawk. Film

* **Blade.** Movie based on *Tomb of Dracula* character at New World. Script: Lee Goldberg & William Rabkin. Still "active."

Blondie. CBS animated special.

Brenda Starr, Reporter. Movie starring Brooke Shields & Timothy Dalton. Release expected this year.

* **Bugs Bunny.** *Bugs Bunny & Tweety* airs on ABC Saturdays. *Tiny Tunes*. New TV series teaming Steven Spielberg & Warner Bros., in works. Features young Warner characters. Debuts fall 1990

* **Bullwinkle.** *Boris & Natasha*, a live-action comedy, with Sally Kellerman & Dave Thomas. Script: Charles Fradin. Charles Martin-Smith, director. Due out fall '89. Video release of *Bullwinkle* begins late '89.

Captain America. Broadway musical in development.

Cathy. Animated TV specials on CBS

The Chameleon. New hero created by Stan Lee for TV. Bitten by a chameleon as a boy, hero can transform himself to look like anyone.

* **Charlie Chan.** Movie.

Chip & Dale. Their Disney animated syndicated series, *Rescue Rangers*, debuts fall 1989.

Conan. Sequel in limbo.

Cracked. Superhero parody movie in development.

Crossfire. TV pilot. ABC.

Daredevil. Character to be introduced in *Hulk* TV movie. Bill Bixby, director. Airs May, NBC. Costume now black, not comics' red, and without horns or D/D emblem.

Deathlok. Movie. New World.

Delta Tenn. TV series to star Shannon Tweed in works.

DNAgents. Movie. UA.

* **Dick Tracy.** Movie. Touchstone. Warren Beatty, director & star. Now filming. Cast: Al Pacino, Madonna. Release date: summer 1990.

Doc Savage. Movie.

* **Dr. Strange.** Movie. Script: Bob Gale. Looking for studio.

* **Elektra.** Movie. Script: L.M. Kit Carson & Jim McBride. McBride may direct. Presumed "dead" at New World.

Elfquest. Movie in limbo.

* **The Executioner.** Movie. Sylvester Stallone stars. Filming delayed. Apparently aborted.

Fantastic Four. Movie with Neve Constantin. Progress expected by 1990. Bernard Eichinger, producer.

* **The Far Side.** Movie of Gary Larson panels. Alan Rudolph, director. Alive Films. Dead?

Felix the Cat. Animated feature. New World

* **The Flintstones.** Movie. Script: Steven de Souza. May star Jim Belushi & Rick Moranis. Joel Silver, producer. Tentative, but still "alive."

Garfield. Saturday a.m. series. *Garfield & Friends*, on CBS (includes adaptations of Jim Davis' *U.S. Acres*).

The Green Hornet. Movie. For Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish.

Green Lantern. Movie. Joel Silver, producer.

Hagar the Horrible. Animated CBS special.

* **He-Man.** New version of animated series in discussion.

The Incredible Hulk. Next NBC TV movie, *The Trial of the Incredible Hulk*, to air shortly (May?).

Iron Man. Character to be introduced in Hulk TV movie.

* **The Jetsons.** Animated film, Hanna-Barbera/Universal fall '89 release

Indiana Jones. Sequel due May. Comic, too.

Jonny Quest. Syndicated animated series. Live-action movie to be written & directed by Fred Dekker. For Taft Entertain-

ment/Keith Barish Productions.

Judge Dredd. Movie. Script: Tim Hunter & James Crumley. Hunter will direct. Charles Lippincott, producer.

Kaptain Keen & Ko. Planned as a syndicated, daily animated series from Rankin-Bass.

* **Li'l Abner**. Media revival planned. Dave Bell & Herbert Krosney, producers, plan animated series, TV specials and possible new musical.

The Lone Ranger. TV revival projected.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Movie. Edward Pressman, producer.

Luke Cage & Iron Fist. Movie. New World. Script: Michael Janover.

MAD Magazine. CBS-TV special from Hanna-Barbera Series pilot.

* **Mai the Psychic Girl**. Movie. Optioned by writer/producer Larry Wilson. Co-producer: Walter Hill. With Carolco.

Mickey Mouse. New animated shorts planned.

Mighty Mouse. CBS Saturday animated series, *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures*, continues. Ralph Bakshi, producer. Animated movie mulled.

Mr. Jigsaw. Ron Fortier-Gary Gross character optioned for animation by Rankin-Bass

Mr. Magoo. Movie. Steven Tisch, producer.

* **My Secret Identity**. Syndicated sitcom features teenage Ultraman. (see article)

Nancy. *Nancy The Movie*. Character is to be seen in her 30s, reunited with Sluggo. Peter Muller, producer.

Neil the Horse. Animation-live-action project.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. Movie. Debra Hill & Lynn Obst, producers. Stephen Herek, director. Script: Greg Pruss.

Joe Palooka. Broadway musical

Peanuts. Four half-hour historical animated TV specials air this spring.

The Phantom. Movie. Bruce Sherlock, Peter Sjoquist, John Torv, Rodney Price, producers. Script: Ken Shadie. *Phantom* creator Lee Falk is consulting.

Plastic Man. Movie. Joe Dante may direct. Separate scripts by Charles Gale & Joe Lafia. In development at Guber-Peters.

The Protector. Character teaming Marvel & Warner Bros.

* **The Punisher**. Movie. Dolph Lundgren stars. Lou Gossett & Jeroen Krabbe co-star. Mark Goldblatt, director. Summer release. (see article)

Radio Boy. Animated. Rankin-Bass.

Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman. Movie. May star Jim Belushi. Script. creator David Boswell. Matt Weisman, Joseph Loeb II, producers.

RoboCop. Sequel. Script: comics' Frank Miller. Animated version part of *Marvel Universe*.

The Rocketeer. Movie. Disney. Bill Dear, director. Script: Danny Bilson & Paul De Meo.

Roger Rabbit. Stars in a new animated short "Tummy Trouble" for June release. Rob Minkoff, director.

Sally Forth. Universal sitcom in development.

Sgt. Preston of the Yukon. TV revival projected.

* **Sgt. Rock**. Movie. To star Arnold Schwarzenegger. John McTiernan, director. Joel Silver, producer. Postponed, but is expected to happen. Steven de Souza is rewriting script.

* **The Shadow**. Movie. Script: Howard Franklin. Martin Bregman, producer. Not dead.

She-Hulk. Character to be introduced in Hulk TV movie.

* **The Silver Surfer**. Animated series seems "dead."

* **Spider-Man**. Cannon Films version. Albert Pyun, director. Scheduled to be shooting. Animated version on *Marvel Universe*.

* **Sub-Mariner**. Movie. May still be alive at New World.

Superboy. Half-hour syndicated TV series continues.

Superman. Cannon Films has announced a *Superman V*. Not a "certainty." Animated series from Ruby-Spears airs on CBS.

* **Swamp Thing**. Movie. *The Return of Swamp Thing*. (see article)

* **Tales from the Crypt**. HBO Cable series. Initial episodes directed by Robert Zemeckis, Richard Donner and Walter Hill. Joel Silver, producer. (see item).

Tarzan. New TV movie to air on CBS. *Tarzan in Manhattan*. Stars Joe Lara.

Thor. Animated series

* **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**. Animated series airing nationwide. 52 more episodes authorized to allow for daily (weekday) broadcast this fall. Live-action film in works for X-Mas '89 release. Script: Bobby Herbeck.

Time Beavers. Animated TV series. Kushner-Locke.

Tin-Tin. Movie "on back burner" at Amblin.

Trouble with Girls. Movie.

* **Unlimited Powers**. CBS is developing a TV series featuring a super-team of DC heroes: Dr. Occult, Blok (from *LSH*), Green Arrow's daughter & a future Flash.

* **V for Vendetta**. Movie. Warner Bros.

WARP. Script: Mark Victor & Michael Grais, producers.

* **Watchmen**. Movie. Script: Sam Hamm. Terry Gilliam, director. Joel Silver, producer. (see item)

Whisper. Movie. Developed by Atlantic Releasing to star Vanity.

Wizard of Id. Movie. Script. Steven de Souza, Dana Olsen. David & Jerry Zucker to direct.

Wolverine. Movie. Reportedly still alive at New World Pictures.

The X-Men. Animated TV series pilot. Now on video.

Zippyvision. Movie Script: Bill Griffith & Diane Noomin Features Zippy the Pinhead.

Zorro. Half-hour TV series *Zorro—The Legend Continues*. co-produced by New World & France's Ellipse Programme.

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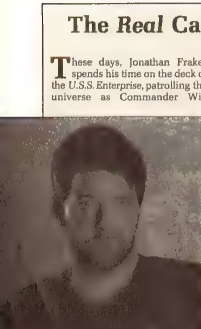
The *Real* Captain America

These days, Jonathan Frakes spends his time on the deck of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, patrolling the universe as Commander Will Riker. But just a few short years ago, Frakes fought for justice, sort of, as a different kind of hero. Not long ago, Jonathan Frakes was Captain America.



Next Generation Photo. Copyright 1989 Permanent Pictures Corporation.

In *The Next Generation*, Frakes aspires to captain a starship as Commander Will Riker.

"I used to work for Marvel Comics," explains the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* star, "when I first went to New York. Another man and I were assigned to open up shopping malls and supermarkets, to ride in to parking lots on the front of rental cars holding garbage can bottoms while wearing the Captain America and Spider-Man Spandex costumes."

He laughs. "We would humiliate ourselves for $50 for the weekend," he adds. "Children would generally come up and say, 'You don't even look like Captain America. Where are your muscles? Captain America's bigger than you. Captain America's better than you.' Then, they would go up to the other guy. 'You don't even look like Spider-Man. You're too fat to be Spider-Man.'

"This is the same period in my life when I was playing Santa Claus at Lord & Taylor in New York City—and Lord & Taylor does not have a toy department. I was put in the furniture/luggage department in a red and white suit with rabbit fur cuffs and a pillow. And I had to deal with the very same children. They would say, 'You don't even look like Santa Claus. We saw the *real* Santa Claus at FAO Schwarz [toy store].'

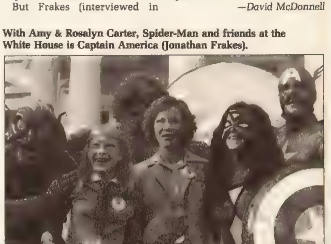
"That was a very good period in my life," sighs Frakes. "Only costume work I did. Santa Claus. Captain America."

But Frakes (interviewed in STARLOG #131) did encounter a few strange new life forms and new civilizations while beneath the mask of Captain America. "I did play the White House once as Captain America. It was the Captain America-Amy Carter Environmental Lawn Party hosted by Rosalynn Carter. That's true.

"So, I have been to the White House," announces Jonathan Frakes. "Nobody knew it was me." His eyes sparkle. "I was there with Spider-Man."

—*David McDonnell*

With Amy & Rosalyn Carter, Spider-Man and friends at the White House is Captain America (Jonathan Frakes).



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HBO Digs Up "Tales from the Crypt"

Tales from the Crypt is finally coming to television. But not before it comes to the movies.

Three 30-minute adaptations of the classic EC Comics anthology line will be cut together into a 90-minute feature that will have a European theatrical release beginning in June. The three episodes, directed by Richard (*Ladyhawke*) Donner, Walter (*Red Heat*) Hill and Robert (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*) Zemeckis, will debut in the U.S. on the HBO payscable network in July.

Crypt producer Joel Silver, who declines to give story particulars, does offer that the three episodes, budgeted at $600,000 each, will be faithful to their comic-book roots.

"The stories are being adapted from the originals and are changed slightly, but in terms of tone, they're very close to being a literal translation of the comic books," says Silver. "The film will feature a wraparound element with the Crypt-Keeper."

Richard Donner, who grew up reading EC comics, says that going the cable TV route is aiding in bringing *Tales from the Crypt* to life uncensored. "We've gotten a lot more freedom on cable to do these things right than we would have on the networks," explains Donner. "But the violence is not so much graphic as it is tongue-in-cheek and there's quite a sense of humor in these stories as well.

"A group of us recently sat through a screening of the Zemeckis segment and it scared everybody shitless. And yet we were laughing all the way through."

Silver, who claims his *Flintstones* and *Sgt. Rock* projects are still on and in the planning stages, indicates that at least three additional *Crypt* tales will be shot for HBO.

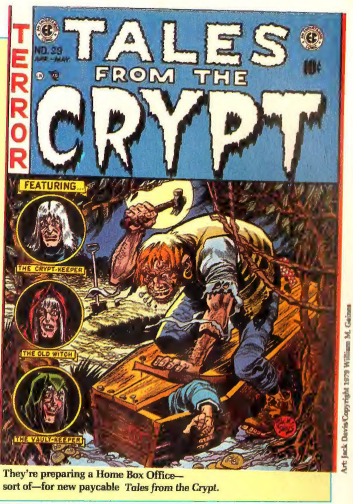
"At the present time, we've got 12 other stories being prepared," says Silver. "From that group, we'll decide on the second three."

Silver isn't sure at this point whether *Tales from the Crypt* will become a regular series. But he does note that the potential is there for *Tales from the Crypt* to have a long run.

"Our production company owns the rights to the stories from *Tales from the Crypt*, *Vault of Horror*, *Crypt of Terror* and *Shock*. That's more than 530 stories.

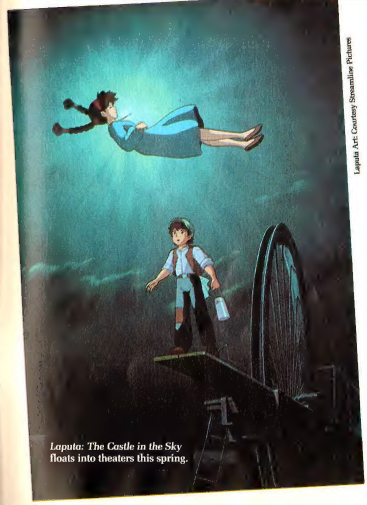
"That's a lot of stories we can tell."

—*Marc Shapiro*



Art: Jack Davis/Copyright 1979 William M. Gaines

They're preparing a Home Box Office—sort of—for new paycable *Tales from the Crypt*.



Laputa Art: Courtesy Streamline Pictures

***Laputa: The Castle in the Sky* floats into theaters this spring.**

The Lure of "Laputa"

This spring, the best of Japanese animation began playing in America—uncut, faithfully translated into English, and presented on the big screen, starting with Streamline's release of *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*.

"The general public isn't aware of the fine animation that's produced in Japan," says Jerry Beck, Streamline's co-founder and president of distribution. "Unfortunately, they know of the shows that are very badly done, like *Tranzor Z* and *Prince Planet*. Because they have those characters with the big wide eyes in them, everyone now knows that that represents Japanese animation. That represents *junk*.

"So, we're trying to show people that Japanese animation is a style of animation; it is its own art form. They're *beautiful*. They have, in many cases, full animation, and they take on subjects that the animation film directors in America are afraid to go into and haven't gone into."

Streamline's first release, the action/adventure tale *Laputa*, involves two children, air pirates, government agents and the military searching for the legendary Laputa, a flying castle with great treasure and a terrifying secret. The movie is noteworthy for its lavish designs, special FX and stunts which would cost a fortune if filmed in live action. *Laputa* was written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki, whose other works include *Lupin III: Castle of Cagliostro*, *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind* (edited and released in America as *Warriors of the Wind*), and the just-released *Toturo of the Neighborhood*.

Laputa began its American run in March, but will be playing one theater at a time in select cities. Meanwhile, Streamline will release *Twilight of the Cockroaches*, which Beck describes as "more of an art film than the usual kind of Japanese animation." *Twilight* is a blend of live action and animation, with cockroaches battling humans.

Streamline is currently negotiating with the producers of *Lensman*, *Fist of the North Star* and *Akira*, for possible American releases this year. Plans are to distribute at least four or five films in 1989, and even more next year. By showing the best of Japanese animation, Jerry Beck says, "We hope that we start a little explosion."

—*Bob Miller*

The Dr. Manhattan Project

After years of waiting for a *Batman* movie, most fans don't want to get too excited about a film version of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* just yet. But so far, things look promising. *Batman* screenwriter Sam Hamm has completed a first draft of the script and director Terry (*Brazil*) Gilliam (STARLOG #141) has been signed to helm the proposed movie for producer Joel (*Die Hard*) Silver and 20th Century Fox.

According to Hamm, *Watchmen* is in very good hands. "Fox is keen on the project," he says. "Joel Silver is happy with the script and is very committed to getting it made. The question at this point is if it can be done on a reasonable budget.

"Terry Gilliam is a daring and excellent pick as director. I couldn't be more delighted," Hamm adds. "There are scenes I wrote into the script that I thought were unplayable, but with Gilliam involved, I can imagine those scenes playing—especially filtered through the sensibility that created *Brazil*."

Though his work on *Batman* helped him nab the *Watchmen* assignment, Hamm immediately realized the fundamental difference between adapting the two properties. "*Watchmen* was harder because it's not a presold concept," he notes. "They could probably put the name *Batman* on two hours of academy leader and still pull $30 million at the box office the first week before the word got out. *Watchmen* must stand on its own as a story and that dictated a more science-fictional approach.

"In plot, incident and tone, the screenplay is very faithful to the comic book," Hamm continues, "though I don't know if Alan Moore would agree. There's a different prologue and ending from the comic, and some reshuffling and recombining of events. But almost every scene in between comes directly from the comics.

"The murder mystery of who killed the Comedian is still the linear throughline that the screenplay hangs on. There are two major plot threads: Someone is stalking the Watchmen—or so Rorschach thinks—and Dr. Manhattan's disappearance puts the world on the brink of nuclear annihilation. By the movie's end, these two strands converge."

Some of Hamm's streamlining includes limiting the costumed cast to Rorschach, Nite Owl, Dr. Manhattan, Silk Spectre, Adrian Veidt (who is not called Ozymandias in the script) and the Comedian. There is also a brief cameo by Captain Metropolis. Overall, Hamm's first draft does a commendable job of adapting the graphic novel. The script retains most of the comic's trademark elements (e.g. the blood-stained smiley face button and the corner newsstand) and even includes flashbacks of origin sequences for Rorschach and Dr. Manhattan.

"The *Watchmen* comic was for people who grew up reading superhero comics and were totally aware of all the genre's conventions," observes Hamm. "I tried to remain as faithful as possible to the comic while trying to give the story more appeal to an audience that's not going to have the same preconceptions about superheroes when they walk into a movie theater."

In an interview in COMICS SCENE #1, Alan Moore shared his casting ideas for the *Watchmen* movie (suggesting Robert De Niro as Nite Owl and Michael York as Ozymandias). Hamm, on the other hand, says he doesn't like to play casting director when he's working on a script. "There have been a couple of occasions where I've tried to write a character around a particular actor's voice, but I don't as a rule," he comments. "Trying to tailor the part [to a particular actor] in such an arcane project is wasted effort.

"I hear a character's voice, but I don't necessarily hear an actor. When I had dinner with Alan Moore, we started out jawboning about comic books, making jokes and having a political bashing session. But the really substantive question I asked him was, 'Do you hear the characters' voices when you write *Watchmen*?' He said, 'Yeah.' And I said, 'Do 'em for me.' "

—Carr D'Angelo

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The Gilliam Factor

With *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* in release, director Terry Gilliam turns his attention to watching the *Watchmen*.

"I *am* directing it," Gilliam says. "With any luck, we'll start shooting in September and be ready for a Christmas 1990 release. Sam Hamm wrote the first screenplay. [See related story. *Munchausen* co-writer] Charles McKeown and I are going to rewrite it.

"The difficulty is that the comic book is so rich. There's so much there that whatever we do, we're going to have to lose many things. Sam Hamm has done a good job of cutting *Watchmen* down to size for a two-hour film. And many things have already been lost—the pirate story, the Minutemen, Hollis the original Nite Owl, the original Silk Spectre, the whole business of the Comedian being Lori's father. Huge chunks are gone and most of those cuts I can live with," Gilliam observes, "but I want to try to get back a better sense of Rorschach and what the characters are about. They only seem to be going through the motions. Much of the characterization and motivation has been lost somewhere along the way.

"Sam's script has a really good opening and a pretty interesting ending that replaces what was always a very messy ending. As a comic, *Watchmen* isn't a perfect work by any means, but with all its flaws, it's an *incredible* work. I hope I can maintain its atmosphere since that's what intrigues me most.

"Charles and I think we can shape the script up fairly quickly because of all of Alan Moore's original material. It's all there. Tons of stuff. It's just a matter of going back to the original and picking and choosing."

The filmmaker has already added one significant name to the cadre of *Watchmen* creative personnel. Impressed with his *Batman* work, Gilliam hired production designer Anton Furst to create the world of *Watchmen* (For a glimpse of Furst's production designs, see page 33).

Of course, *Watchmen* will be one of a mob of comics-based films hitting the silver screen. *Watchmen* producer "Joel Silver thinks that's good," says Gilliam. "He thinks people will really be more aware of the comic-book film genre by the time *Watchmen* comes out. It's the flipside, the dark underbelly of comics."

Gilliam, the American member of Monty Python who began his career working as an artist with Harvey Kurtzman on *Help!* for Warren Publications, is a longtime comics fan. And to Gilliam, *Watchmen* holds a special appeal. "The comic book is brilliantly dore," he says. "The writing is great and the characters have a wonderful world view. I've always fancied doing a comic book-based film. I've always been a critic of other people who tried it and failed. So, I thought it was about time for me to put up or shut up.

"The chord that it strikes with me is that it's a metaphor for my generation—all the people of the '60s who tried to change the world and make it a better place and did do certain things, but ultimately it all fell apart. Then, the '70s and '80s came along. And the *Watchmen are* middle-aged. Like many people from the '60s, who had those incredibly high ideals, some sold out. Some went commercial. Some went back to work for the government. Some went underground and went crazy. And some wallowed in nostalgia. That's what I think the Watchmen are. Now, they've got their chance to save the world again."

—Kim Howard Johnson

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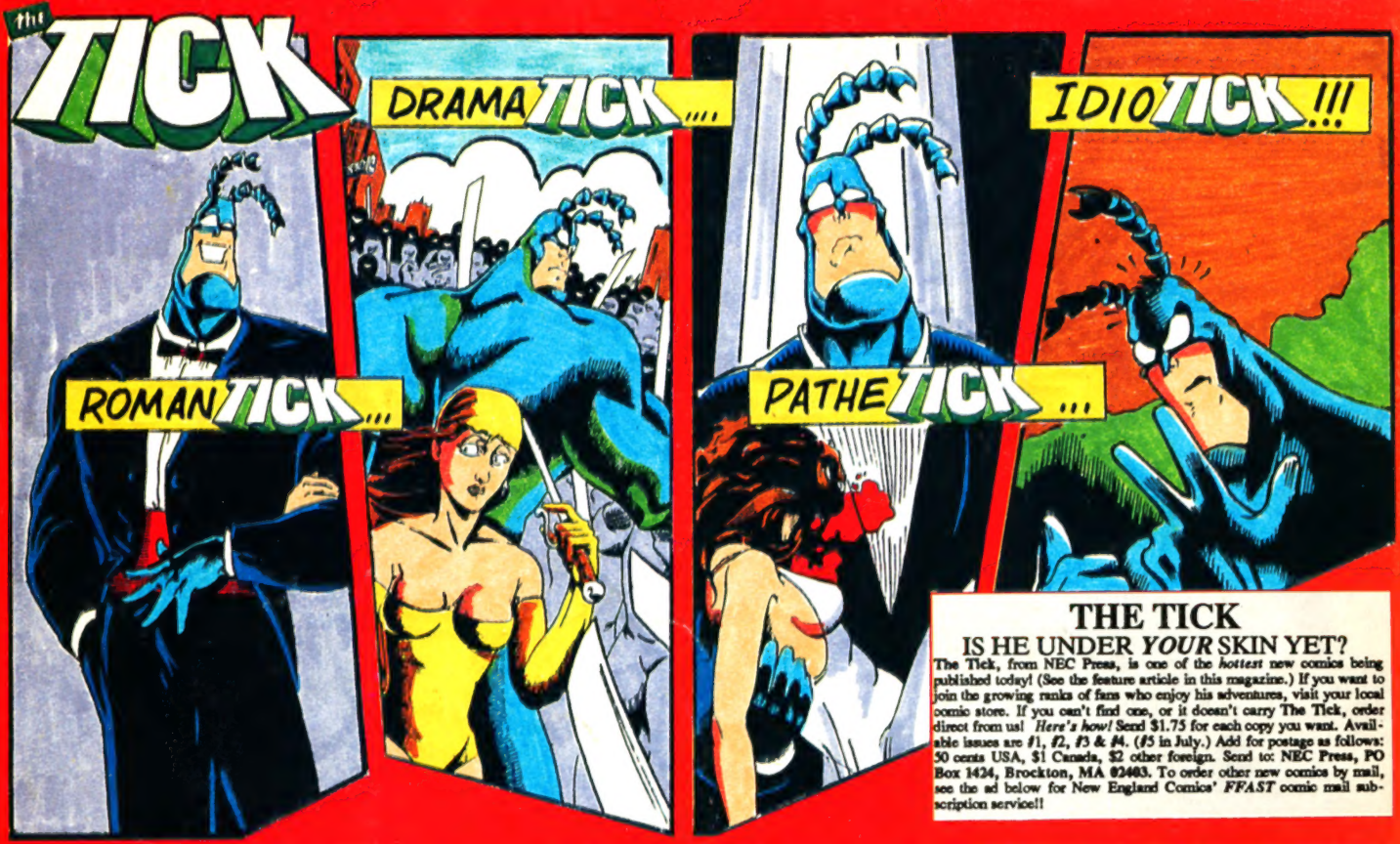

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